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The Fulness of Life

THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL SIN

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Editorial

Of late we have become increasingly aware of the role of unjust structures and systems in our lives. The difference between personal injustice and strucutral injustice explains, for the most part, why the majority of the people in the world are trapped in poverty, why even in the developed countries the gap between the rich and the poor grows wider. It is imperative for us to learn to locate those structures that aid and abet injustice. Traditionally we have been reflecting on the human person intrapersonally as well as interpersonally. In other words, we had focused on the uniqueness of the individual as well as on the relational aspect of his personhood. We have, however, failed to view him *societally*, namely, in the dimension of his relationship to human environments — structures, systems, institutions and processes.

Sin is a central theme in Christianity. It is the human race's inclination toward selfishness, manipulation of others and ego-gratification. Christian deliverance has traditionally been regarded as freeing the individual from sin — greed, pride, lust, sloth, etc. Accordingly, it had been readily assumed that social improvement could be wrought merely by the conversion of individuals, thereby casting doubt, perhaps inadvertently, on the ability of institutions to enhance or defeat justice.

Today people are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of institutions on human behaviour. They realize that even the noblest intentions of individuals hardly suffice to resist the pressures and contraints of cultural patterns and impersonal institutions. Consequently, skeptical as they are of the ability of 'good people' to produce

justice, they reject the doctrine that a moral rearmament is the only key to greater social justice. Making everyone good does not guarantee a just society. The exploitative tendency of capitalists, for instance, cannot be explained merely by the fact that their hearts are sordid. They are part of a system that urges them to exploit. Attempts to change unjust institutions must go hand in hand with efforts to improve moral values of individuals. Constitutional guarantees are a better safeguard of human rights than reliance on the wisdom and honesty of administrators and judges

In this context the sectional editor explores the nature of social sin as pre-eminently consisting in structural injustice and the grave need for conversion from it. Thomas Srampical discusses the relationship between social sin and conscience with a view to locating the culpability of social sin and re-forming of conscience. What George Therukattil deals with is social justice which is the primary requisite for conversion from social sin and the consequent life style and spirituality. Collective sin forms the theme of George Lobo's article and the collective responsibility for repairing it.

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Social Sin and Conscience

Theology, especially moral theology, is quite familiar with the concept of sin. It makes various divisions and distinctions in order to bring out the nuances of this complex concept. A new-comer to the category of sin is 'Social sin'. The idea has been evolving for sometime[1]. The term however gained currency and popularity through discussions on liberation theology. This is an attempt to relate social sin to conscience. Talking about conscience in the context of discussing social sin is quite relevant because any formal sin is a culpable violation of one's conscience. A problem usually raised about social sin is precisely whether it is a formal sin; whether anybody is responsible for it. Further, we are concerned not only with the mere idea of social sin, but also how people's conscience can be formed that they do not acquiesce in it. Responsibility for social sin and conscience formation are therefore two important points of our discussion. However, we shall begin with an elucidation of the concept of social sin itself.

I. Social Sin

The Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* (1984) of Pope John Paul II speaks, in its article 16, of social sin. There the Pope suggests three senses in which the term 'Social Sin' can be understood. In one sense, it refers to those sins which by their very object cause damage to others. Theft, robbery, mutilation, sexual violence, murder and many others of a similar nature belong to this category. In another sense, the term refers to the social

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1. M. Sievernich, 'Social Sin and its Acknowledgement' *Concilium*, 190 (2/1987), pp. 52-63

impact of any species of sin, internal or external. Since man is essentially a social being and every believer an integral part of the faith community, the moral depravity of any one affects the whole community through his solidarity with it. As the Apostolic Exhortation reminds us "there is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, the most strictly individual one, that exclusively concerns the person committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family" (art. 16). In its third sense, social sin signifies sinfulness that is contained in and becomes operative through social structures. Social arrangements of various sorts — relationships, transactions, establishments, institutions etc. — which are supposed to promote justice, well-being and peace are turned into means of domination and exploitation. Such structures whose working brings about injustice and exploitation on the local, national and international levels come under this understanding of social sin. It is therefore sin objectified in social structures and these, arising from sin, lead to further sins.

Uniqueness of the third sense

Of the three senses of social sin mentioned above, the first one refers in fact to personal sins, i.e., sins directly committed by personal agents. The second one refers to the social impact caused directly by the internal or external sins of personal agents. Somebody's personal sin — e.g., an act of robbery — is the direct cause of the damage inflicted on the victim (social sin in the first sense) as well as of a corresponding destabilization and deterioration of the moral fibre of the community concerned (social sin in the second sense). None of these two understandings of social sin are new, and we have no difficulty in talking of these phenomena in terms of sin because in both instances personal sins are referred to.

In the third sense, however, reference is to sinfulness objectified in social structures which are a 'cause' for further sins. These structures are of course conse-

quences of personal sins of individuals. As the papal exhor-
tation puts it "cases of social sin are the result of the
accumulation and concentration of many personal sins"
(art.16). But what the term social sin directly refers to are
sin-embodying and sin producing structures, not the
personal sins that have caused these structures. Such a
usage of the term 'sin', i.e., applying it to social institu-
tions, arrangements, etc, is something new[2].

   An important fact to be reckoned with is that social
structures once established become in various measures
self-subsisting and capable of perpetrating evil. The actua-
lization of the evil contained in bad structures need not,
and in several cases does not, require a personal sin
here and now committed to that effect. Besides, the
working of the established structures often seems to go
beyond the control of individuals and groups. Thus struc-
tures take on a certain autonomy in their existence and
functioning; they appear like independent agents without
at the same time being personal. It is probably this pheno-
menon of independence without being personal that makes
the third understanding of social sin unique as well as
problematic and distinguishes it from the other two.

II.   Responsibility

   When the term 'sin' is used of structures, questions
and comments like "Can structures sin"? "Can they be
personal"? "Only persons sin, not structures", etc., im-
mediately arise. Yes, only a person can sin by willingly
violating, by commission or omission, a moral obligation
proposed to him as such by his conscience. Social struc-
tures cannot sin in this sense, of course. But some social
structures embody evil and bring about further sins and
it is in this sense that they are called sinful. Such usages
are not unknown in moral theological tradition. We speak
of objective (material) and subjective (formal) sins, while
we know that only subjective sins are truly sinful. How-
ever, the attribution of objective sin to an action warns us
that the action concerned is really evil and a disorder and

2.   Cfr. Sievernich, op.cit. p. 55

hence should be avoided. If someone intentionally does such an action or permits it without proportionate reason, then it becomes truly sinful. Similarly there are structures which contain much evil and disorder, whose operation can be truly sinful.

However, if structures are not themselves respon-sible, who else are responsible for them ? Evidently, those who create, evolve, maintain and make use of bad structures and those who cooperate in all this. But are they culpable ? If so, how can it be explained ? In order to illustrate the influence of bad structures and the nature of responsibility for social sin, a comparison is sometimes made with concu-piscence. Evil structures mean for society what concu-piscence means for the individual: They arise from sin and lead to sin[3]. A comparison with habitual sin, we think, can throw much light on the nature of responsibility for social sin. A habitual sin is the violation of a moral obli-gation influenced by the power of a habit. Such a vio-lation proceeds from diminished deliberation, for the power of habit diminishes the cognitive sensitivity to the evil of the act and especially the free consent of the will·

Habits may be voluntary or involuntary. It is not how-ever very easily that someone contracts a truly involuntary habit because in the process of contracting it one becomes aware (and others may remind him as well) of where he is heading to. By this we do not deny the possibility or existence of truly involuntary habits. As for responsibility, one is responsible for a voluntarily contracted bad habit, its maintenance and foreseeable consequences. Hence one has to correct it. Regarding an involuntary habit, one is responsible for its maintenance and foreseeable bad con-sequences, unless serious and sincere efforts are made to eradicate it. In the absence of such efforts both voluntary and involuntary habits become sinful; if one is complacent with bad habits, his sinfulness is worse still. Human per-son, his existence is not just momentary; he has a history. His present is influenced by the past. Therefore

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3. Cfr. Sievermich, op cit. p. 56

his responsibility for a present act is judged not only on the basis of his here and now voluntary involvement in it, but also of his past style of life.

Bad habits in a person have several similarities to evil structures in society. Both result from patterns of past sinful activity and are probably reinforced by the present; both cause new sins. Once established, both become quasi-autonomous, though individuals or groups of individuals are in varying measures ultimately responsible for both. However, compared to an individual's bad habit, bad social structures imply an intricate issue of complexly shared responsibility. This however does not make the problem less serious or less urgent.

In line with the principles stated above regarding responsibility for bad habits we can say that all those who voluntarily create, maintain, use and cooperate with evil structures are responsible for them. As for involuntarily evolved ones, those who maintain, use and cooperate with them are responsible. All these people have the moral task of acknowledging their sin and earnestly working together to unmake or remake the structures. Those who hold key positions of authority and decision making bear evidently greater responsibility and those with lesser roles share proportionately lesser responsibility. All such cooperators have to come out of their laziness, silence, indifference, conspiracy, illusion about the impossibility of changing structures, greed and selfishness (cfr. art. 16) and use all reasonable means to remake the structures. Unwillingness to do so is truly sinful and consequently the very structures become sinful.

III.   Conscience Formation

Though unjust social structures were causing injustice and damage in the past, they were not doing so as forcefully as today; the structures were all taken for granted or tolerated as necessary part of societal life. Today however we have begun to see the enormous role played by bad structures in perpetrating and perpetuating injustice and exploitation; we have begun to be aware of the human res-

ponsibility involved in their creation and maintenance and of
the truth of their being violations of God's will and plan.
Therefore we begin to call them sinful. We further know that
it is not objective moral laws and norms as such but our con-
science that persuades us to act morally. In the moral
sphere we move when our conscience moves us. In order
therefore that people may become readily aware of the
sinfulness of bad social structures and of their own res-
ponsibility for them, that they may take prompt measures
to remake the structures it is necessary that a socially sen-
sitive conscience be formed in them. It should not be a
socially acquiescent conscience, silently agreeing with what-
ever the society or its influential section does. What is
needed therefore is a socially sensitive and critical con-
science. We do not mean that such a conscience is a
panacea for all social maladies, but that it is a prime re-
quirement for any effective and lasting social change.

Drawing on certain relevant findings of today's em-
pirical psychology and insights of contemporary moral
theology we can indicate in broad outlines some of the
important components of such a conscience.

Dimensions of conscience

Looking at conscience from an empirical point of
view helps us to understand its complexity and conse-
quently also the difficulty of forming a mature conscience.
Empirical psychology distinguishes three aspects or dimen-
sions in the functioning of conscience: cognitive, motiva-
tional (behavioural) and emotional.

The *cognitive* dimension refers to the aspect of
moral knowledge in conscience. It includes one's awareness
of moral values, knowledge of moral principles and laws,
the ability to think, evaluate and judge in the light of
these norms. This is evidently an important dimension
because without some moral knowledge no conscience can
function. The traditional moral theological definition of
conscience as the "judgement of the practical intellec
about the morality of an act ..." focuses on this dimen-
sion. The characteristics of the cognitive dimension (e.g.
whether it is legalistic or personalistic, individualistic or

communitarian, etc.) definitely affect the quality of one's conscience. The *motivational* dimension refers to the individual's feeling of persuasion and sense of obligation to act according to the promptings based on his moral knowledge. Since this implies an urge and persuasion to behave morally it is also called behavioural dimension. The more personalized and meaningful the cognitive dimension (the moral norms, values etc. one possesses) the stronger will be the motivation to live according to them. The *emotional* dimension refers to the various emotions people are liable to have upon complying with (happiness, satisfaction, etc.) or violating (fear, shame, guilt, etc) inner moral promptings. Since these pleasant feelings subsequently reinforce good behaviour and unpleasant feelings tend to inhibit bad behaviour, they are considered to render additional strength to the motivational dimension. A good (or mature) conscience therefore presupposes the ability to function harmoniously in all three dimensions on the basis of values which are *authentic* and *autonomous*.

Authentic

First of all, the norms and principles that guide a mature conscience should be based on authentic christian vision. The ideas of morality and sin in general and that of justice in particular are very important. The idea of ''vertical morality and sin'' which has been prevalent in our thinking should yield to the covenant vision of morality and sin. The vertical view is predominantly individualistic. It considers morality as an affair between oneself and one's God who has given certain laws for observance. Sin correspondingly is the violation of a God-given law. Unless a sinful act were directly to inflict damage on the neighbour, one with the vertical conception would not be touched by the social consequences of his act. He would not feel guilty for them. He might feel quite all right after making confession. In the light of the covenant which establishes a bond between God and the community and also within the community, one sees oneself bound to God and to the brethren who are all children of the same

Father. One with the covenant-vision therefore would see his moral life and struggle as part and parcel of the moral striving of the community, which is called to realize the morality of the Kingdom. Such a one is more likely to feel involved in and concerned with even the indirect social consequences of his sin and failure. Even after gaining personal forgiveness through repentant confession, he would be willing to do what he can to make up for his misdeeds. The idea of justice and injustice is very important in this context. The highly legalistic, individualistic and minimalistic idea of justice and right developed from the Aristotelian base, which is still very predominant in our thinking, should be permeated by the personalistic and communitarian concept of justice as found in the Bible. In short, insights of the covenant relationship should enliven our vision of moral norms and obligations. Moral catechesis has to pay special attention to this factor.

Autonomous

Study and research in moral psychology as well as our common experience show that people — young and old — are prompted in their moral responses by diverse motives. Fear of punishment, desire for approval, social conventions and personal appreciation for values are some of them. Psychological theories categorize various types of conscience and morality on the basis of different moral motivations. Without going into much detail, we shall discuss a common classification of moral motivation (and conscience): heteronomy, socionomy and autonomy.

The real motivating force of a *heteronomous* conscience, as its name indicates, lies in something outside of it. It may be fear of punishment by parents, rejection by peers, fear of losing the love and approval of some significant persons, etc. It is very much a selfish conscience which is concerned with the protection of its own interests and satisfaction of needs. It may be rightly called fear morality or sentimental morality in so far as it is based on fear of punishment or maintenance of sentimental relationships. Being guided by such selfish orientations, people with such consciences are hardly con-

cerned with or worried about the consequences of their acts for others. Though theoretically this motivation is characteristic of early childhood and earlier part of late childhood, it may continue to be the dominant motivation even in later years, if moral growth happens to be blocked by unhealthy environmental factors like considerable deprivation of physical and emotional needs, highly punitive discipline, frequent exposure to hedonistic view or style of life, etc.

Socionomy is very much a morality of social conventions. A conscience of *socionomous* persuasion is concerned with social order and well-being in so far as it is protected and attained by established customs, conventions, structures and laws. People of this type almost take it for granted that social structures are all for the good of the society and feel satisfaction and pleasure in maintaining them. They, therefore, tend to acquiesce in the *status quo* and do not dare to question the structures and set up even when they inflict damage on people. In other words, they keep on doing what is expected of them and do not try to disturb the structures which, they think, are there always for the well being of the society. This conventional morality theoretically speaking emerges in the latter part of late childhood and continues through adolescence. In practice however this seems to be predominantly persistent in very many grown ups. Some of the reasons for it's persistence are the following: it is not so immature as its forerunner which is based on fear and sentimentality; it has an acceptable justification that social structures are meant for the common good, which is theoretically valid; it provides ample room to selfish and influential people to manipulate structures in order to promote their own interests; it helps many others rest content with the *status quo* without having to take up the risky task of calling the structures into question; and finally the lack of factors which promote autonomy. As it is clear, socionomous conscience tends to promote and perpetuate social structures uncritically.

The motivating force of an *autonomous* conscience

comes from within the person, from his inner conviction of the significance of the authentic norms and values he has personalized. While in the previous types (heteronomous and socionomous) of morality the contents of norms and values are dictated by significant others or social conventions; here they flow from the dignity and worth of the human person, who is the image of God, and his rights. Such a conscience, in so far as it is possessed of authentic and personalized values, will be aware of the dignity of every person, of the need to protect their rights, and will be disposed to question unjust structures and try to remake them.

Autonomous conscience however is not an automatic product of any particular stage of growth. It emerges only after the individual has attained certain intellectual and social maturity (late adolescence or youth) and needs to be further fostered in order to be well established. Three important factors may be mentioned which facilitate the process of its emergence and promotion:

Value clarification

By means of exposure to moral issues and problems individuals (in groups) should be given opportunity to discuss, dispute and clarify the values involved. The significance of genuine christian values and norms, especially the dignity of the human person, human solidarity and obligation to care for the weak, etc., should be well clarified. Such (guided) clarification will facilitate personalization and autonomy better than mere instruction.

Responsible choice

Opportunity should be given especially to growing individuals to make their own decisions and choices according to their personalized values. They should be allowed and encouraged to live upto them and accept the consequences, pleasant or unpleasant. They should also watch out whether they themselves (or their club, association, group etc.) develop unfair patterns or styles of behaviour and functioning, and if so, should be sorted out and corrected. Conventions and patterns develop easily

and therefore they should be checked in the light of one's authentic and personalized values; otherwise one may easily slip into conventional morality.

Mature models

Mature models is another important factor needed to promote the growth of autonomous conscience, especially in youngsters. These growing individuals should have the opportunity to see others significant — in the familial, ecclesiastical, business, social spheres — practising genuine and personalized values. This is not to foster an heteronomous morality based on sentimental relationship with those significant persons, but to inculcate in the youngsters love and appreciation for the genuine values those people profess and practise. The more of such mature models are present in the various spheres of society, the better for the conscience formation of the younger generation and for remedying the evils of social structures which are often promoted or silently tolerated by selfish and conventional moralities. Their scarcity or absence will exert corresponding adverse influence on the moral formation of the younger generation and on the moral well being of the society.

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Oppression/Liberation Experience of Israel in Exodus

Instruction on "Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation" starts by acknowledging that the powerful and almost irresistible aspiration that people have for liberation constitutes one of the principal signs of the times which the Church has to examine and interpret in the light of the Gospel (I.1), and calls on the resources of theologians and thinkers in the Church to continue the ongoing reflection on the social teaching of the Church, for 'this teaching is by no means closed' (XI.12). What follows is a modest attempt to see how the Exodus experience of Israel — a temporal salvation from the house of bondage — stands out as the prototype of God's redemptive activity on behalf of his people.

I

The first fifteen chapters of the Book of Exodus is above all an account of a deliverance which God wanted and brought about, using Moses as a mediator. The people of Israel interpreted the event as God's will to deliver or bring his people up out of Egypt, the 'house of slavery'. This affirmation occurs again and again throughout the Bible, from the Pentateuch to the latest books of the Old Testament, Daniel and Wisdom, and in every literary form found in the OT. It is, in fact, the basic article of Israel's faith[1].

The oppression of the Israelites is attributed in Exodus to a new king, 'who knew nothing of Joseph' (Ex.1:8),

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1. Roland de Vaux, The Early History of Israel, Westminster Press 978, p. 321.

in contrast to the Pharaoh who had welcomed Joseph, his father and his brothers (Gen. 47:5-7). The reason for the oppression was the great increase in the number of the Israelites who had become a danger to the Egyptians (Ex. 1:9-10).

In addition to what can be gathered from the Book of Exodus, Josephus, the Jewish historian records:

Now it happened that the Egyptians grew delicate and lazy, and gave themselves up to other pleasures, and in particular to the love of gain. They also became very ill-affected towards the Hebrews, as touched with envy at their prosperity..., they became very abusive to the Israelites, and contrived many ways of afflicting them: for they enjoined them to cut a great number of channels for the river, and to build walls for their cities and ramparts, that they might restrain the river, and hinder its waters from stagnating, upon its running over its own banks: they set them to build pyramids... forced them to learn all sorts of mechanical arts and to accustom themselves to hard labour[2].

In the following section we shall look into some of the important vocabularies of this basic experience of oppression/liberation. When the Hebrew texts speak of oppression, they employ different roots, each of which can take the form of verbs, nouns or adjectives, with varying shades of meaning. I shall limit myself to the analysis of just 3 such roots[3].

nagas[4]

This Hebrew root means 'press', 'drive', 'oppress', 'exact'. Etymologically it is related to an Arabic word

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2. Josephus, (Complete Works), Kregel Publication, 1981, Book II, Ch. IX, p. 55.

3. For a detailed analysis of these lexemes, see Thomas D. Hanks, God so loved the Third World, Orbis Books, 1983, p. 3-39.

4. The meaning of the Hebrew words are from: Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hbrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius.

meaning 'rouse and drive' (game), 'drive vehemently'; and to an Ethiopic word meaning 'reign', 'wield power'. As a noun it is frequently used to describe Pharaoh's overseers and their treatment of the people of Israel (Ex. 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13, 14). In the context of the Exodus, it is rendered as 'task master' (RSV), or 'slave driver' (JB).

It is quite probable that the Ugaritic root meaning "overwhelm with work" is related to the Hebrew *nāgaś*[5]. The Egyptians 'made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and bricks, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigour' (Ex. 1:14). Oppression (*nāgaś*) means that the oppressed are exploited; that someone is trying to profit from their forced labour, and those oppressed are kept in a permanent state of misery and wretchedness.

lahas

The term means 'squeeze', 'press' and figuratively 'oppress'. The best example of the literal use occurs in the story of Balaam. On seeing the angel of the Lord blocking the narrow path Balaam's ass 'pushed against the wall and pressed (lāhas) Balaam's foot against the wall (Num. 22:25) The expected response to a painful 'squeeze is a cry'[6].

As in the case of *nāgaś* lahas is used to describe the oppression of Israel in Egypt:

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression - lahas (noun) with which the Egyptians oppress - lahas (verb) them (Ex. 3:9).

In other words, the Israelites were not living in slavery because they were an underdeveloped nation, but rather because the Egyptians were oppressing them — they were 'putting the squeeze' on them. Being the most powerful empire of that time, Egypt could easily do just that. But God sided with the poor and the oppressed. In res-

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5. Thomas D. Hanks, Op.cit., p. 9
6. ibid., p. 10

ponse to his people's outcry (Ex. 3:7), he began the pro-
cess of liberation[7].

anah

More than any other word 'ānāh expresses something
of the devastating impact of oppression. For this root the
lexicons suggest such meanings as 'afflicted', 'be bowed
down'. It is etymologically related to an Arabic word that
means 'be lowly', 'submissive'. In fact anah is the very
fist word we find in the Bible to express oppression. In the
story of the Covenant with Abraham, Yahweh says to
the Patriarch:

Know of a surety that your descendants will be immi-
grants in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves
there, and they will be oppressed (anah) (Gen. 15:13).

Moreover anah is the word used to describe the
oppression suffered by the people of Israel in Egypt:

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress
(anah) them with heavy burdens... But the more they
were oppressed (anah) the more they multiplied and
the more they spread abroad (Ex. 1:11-12).

The Koehler-Baumgartner lexicon attributes to anah
the meaning not only of 'oppress' but also of 'make some-
one feel dependent'[8]. Pharaoh's apprehensions about the
growing strength of Israel and the shrewd and inhuman
measures employed to keep the people in a state of
dependence justified the use of anah.

The oppressed never voluntarily humble (anah) them-
selves before the oppressor. This is clear from the Exo-
dus narrative (2:12). In most cases anah implies the im-
position of another's will (Deut. 8:2; I Kg. 8:35; Is. 25:5;
Ps. 55:22 etc.). In other words the hapless victim of op-
pression is forced to submit himself to the overriding will
of the oppressor.

Tamez[9] rightly says that the oppressors never humble

7. ibid., p. 10.
8. Elsa Tamez, Bible of the Oppressed, Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra,
Indore, 1983, p. 12.
9. ibid., p 13.

themselves (give in) before God either. The oppressor shuts himself against the voice of God, let alone the cry of the oppressed.

> How long will you refuse to humble (anah) yourself before me ? (Ex.10:3).

Ex. 3:7 presents Yahweh as seeing the affliction and hearing the cry of the people. The use of the Infinitive Absolute[10] of the verb $r\bar{a}'\bar{a}h$ = 'see', 'have experience', 'perceive', 'inspect', 'so as to learn to know' suggests the idea of an emphasis on Yahweh's seeing, i.e., not a cursory glance but that Yahweh has a first hand experience/ knowledge of what is going on and that he can no longer postpone his intervention.

The 'cry' (outcry) $\varsigma\dot{a}$ $aq(v)$ with its equivalent ($z\bar{a}$ aq) and the noun form $\varsigma e'\bar{a}qah$ which is closely related to an Arabic word meaning 'sound as a thunder', 'bellow' (bull) suggests the intolerable nature of suffering and the consequent outcry which is loud enough to be heard afar. The outcry is a demand for justice usually made by the oppressed (Gen. 18:21; 27:34; Jer. 31:15).

Pharaoh's stubborn will to oppress and the ruthless measures adopted coupled with Israel's inexorable condition and their groaning call forth Yahweh's intervention on behalf of his people:

> I have seen the affliction (anah) of my people who are in Egypt and has heard their cry (Seaqah) because of their taskmasters (nagas). I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of the land ... to a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex.3:7-8).

Our analysis of these basic vocabularies seems to yield a set pattern: There is an oppressive situation, a yoke that is suffocating and impossible to bear; the expected

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10. In Hebrew the Infinitive Absolute is primarily an adverb used to emphasise the verbal idea in some way. The English translation of this construction will vary from context to context, often requiring the use of an adverb, such as "surely", "certainly", "indeed" etc.

response to this 'squeeze' is an outcry — an outcry that demands justice to be established; someone (in the Exodus context — Yahweh) hears the cry and initiates the process of liberation.

II

Bible speaks about God primarily in verbs, not in nouns[11]. Westermann has corrected the approach of earlier theologies which focused rather on such concepts as 'covenant' by starting from the verbs which characterise the God of the Old Testament, namely 'to save', 'to bless'. The events themselves, the encounter of God and human beings in history are told in verbs of action and reaction, of speaking and responding, of coming and going. This is very conspicuous in Exodus 3: 'I have seen and heard. I know and I have come down.'

And the purpose of God in doing so is: 'to bring out', 'to deliver', 'to save', 'to liberate' those whose cries have reached him. In this section, we discuss some of the verbs used for this liberating activity, in order to show how basic it is for biblical faith to relate to God as the one who liberates.

a) to bring out and to bring up

The verb *'alah* means 'to go up', 'descend', 'climb' 'bring up' (person). Besides these regular meanings the verb is often used in a causative sense[12]. Yahweh sends or causes Moses to 'bring forth' the people out of Egypt. This becomes part of the creed of Israel:

By the strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Ex. 13:14; 20:2; Deut. 6:21).

Similarly the verb *yāṣā'* means 'go or come out'

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11. Westermann's Theology of the Old Testament, quoted by Bastiaan Wielenga, It's a long Road to Freedom, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, 1981, p. 54.

12. The Hiphil verbs, for the most part, are causatives of the corresponding Qal. eg. He caused the words of the king to be heard. A more suitable translation in English would be: "He announced (or made public) the words of the king".

'march out', 'go forth from (the presence of) a person' and in a technical sense 'emancipation', 'to lead out' etc. The verb *yārad* means 'come or go down' 'descend'. Like the verb *alah* these two verbs are often used in a causative sense.

Thus bringing out of the house of bondage means that Yahweh causes them to go up, or go out of the land. The deliverance from Egypt is seen as an activity of Yahweh.

b) to deliver

In Hebrew this is a powerful verb to describe the event of liberation. It means something like to 'tear' or 'snatch' away 'wrench from', 'extricate from'. From 191 occurrences in total, it is 115 times connected with 'min' = out of, and out of this we find 70 times 'out of the hand' or 'out of the power'. This refers to the struggle needed to free the people from the clutches of the oppressors, and to bring them out of the realm of oppression.

Deliverance is needed not only from outward enemies Often the enemies are the wicked in Israel itself, the rich and the rulers who oppress the weak and the poor. Ezekiel announces in his vision of the new society that Yahweh is going to take action against the shepherds of Israel:

I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them (Ez. 34:10).

Though the verb used is *nāṣal*, RSV renders it 'rescue' which otherwise is used to render the verb '*palat*'. However in v. 27 of the same chapter *nasal* is again translated as 'deliver'.

c) to save, deliver, liberate

The verb *yāsha*' with its various derivatives is the most frequent, comprehensive and significant expression for God's liberating activity. RSV renders it in different ways with 'save', 'deliver', 'rescue', 'help', 'to give victory', 'to take vengeance'. This variety makes it difficult to recognize in a cohesive way the significance of this root and its meaning. Etymologically the basic meaning 'to make wide', 'to be spacious', 'be in a spacious locality' leads to

the meaning to 'save', 'to liberate', namely from all sorts of enemies and dangers which surround and enclose and cause the anguish of death[13]. (The antonym is *ṣār* which means 'distress' 'to be in a narrow place'). This may be illustrated with the help of Ex. 2:17. Moses intervenes against the shepherds who drove away the flock of the Midianite priest. RSV translates 'helped'. A more appropriate rendering would have been 'saved' or 'liberated'.

Bastiaan Wielenga points out that the scope of the word is wide and it is impossible to discuss all the instances. But throughout it keeps the connotation of 'setting free'. Whether it relates to the liberation from enemies who oppress the people, or to the recovery of a single person from a terrible sickness, it denotes that Yahweh wants life-in-freedom, and interferes against the powers of oppression and death[14].

Commissioned with the task of bringing forth the people of Israel out of Egypt (Ex.3:10) a reluctant Moses wrests from God the revelation of the divine name (Ex.3: 13-14). It is not necessary for our purpose to go into the various interpretations of this name given in the Theophany of the burning bush[15]. Yahweh was a God who directed man's history and who manifested himself not in the phenomena of the nature taking place in a cycle of seasonal events, like the fertility and vegetation gods, but in historical events following one another in time and moving towards an end[16].

Yahweh, we know from his words and deeds, from his involvement with the human beings in history, of which the Bible tells. He is the one who hears of the cry of the oppressed and who comes to liberate. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by Ex. 3:12 'I will be with you'.

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13. Bastiaan Wielenga, Op.cit., p. 59-60.

14. ibid., p. 61.

15. For a summation of the various scholarly attempts to capture the meaning of this cryptic and puzzling name, see, Roland de Vaux, op. cit., pp. 349-357.

16. Ibid., p. 357.

Thus the revelation of the name YAHWEH is the promise of his presence, it is the revelation of the God who is Emmanuel, God with us[17].

In spite of God's assurance to be with him, Moses hesitates to go and confront the powerful Pharaoh; he doubts whether it is possible to mobilize the sceptical people. It is in this historical context YHWH reveals himself for the first time to Israel as he who is — the liberating God (Ex. 20:2; Lev. 26:13; Hos. 13:4; Ez. 34:27).

III

The Exodus from Egypt, the house of bondage, is for Israel from the beginning a central theme, and a fundamental event in the formation of the people. It was this basic experience that moulded the consciousness of the people of Israel[18]. This event did not remain as a past experience, something that happened at a particular time in a particular place. It became part of their creed. It is a favourite theme of the prophets; their starting point is an awareness of a break with the past. Salvation can come only from a new historical action of Yahweh which will renew in unknown ways his earlier interventions in favour of his people[19].

If Yahweh liberates Israel from bondage in Egypt, it is in order to make her 'his chosen people'. The Sinai Covenant spells out the new social order which Israel is to adopt in order to become Yahweh's people (Ex. 19:4-6). This basic experience of oppression/liberation begins to operate already in that ancient collection of laws known as the book of the covenant:

> You shall not wrong (anah) an immigrant or oppress (lahas) him, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt, you shall not oppress (anah) any widow or orphan. If you oppress (anah) them and they cry out to me, I wll surely hear their outcry and my wrath

17. Bastiaan Wielenga, op.cit., p. 47.
18. Ruben Alves, quoted by Thomas D. Hanks, op.cit., p. 6.
19. Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, SCM Press, 1979, p. 163.

will burn and I will kill you with the sword, and your
wives shall become widows and your children father-
less (Ex. 22:22-24).

Yahweh hears not only the cry of Israel in her dis-
tress, but he hears the cries of all who are oppressed.
According to the Psalmist (Ps. 103:6-7) the Exodus shows
us once and for all what kind of God Yahweh is. Far from
presenting a God who supports an unjust *status quo*, the
Psalmist speaks to us of God who constantly sides the
cause of the oppressed.

The strongly social legislation of Israel's Codes[20]
(The Covenant Code of Ex. 20:22-23:33; the Priestly Code
of Lev. 2-15; the Holiness Code of Lev. 17-26; the Deutero-
nomist Code of Deut. 12:26) is a witness of Israel's attempts
to live up to her vocation of being the people of God.

The deliverance from Egypt under the powerful
arm of Yahweh was to create a new people whose social
organization would be based on the Covenant Code. This
is clear from what Yahweh spoke repeatedly through
Moses to Pharaoh:

Let my people go, that they may serve me (Ex. 8:1;10:3)·

And as an affirmation of his intention He enters into a
covenant on Mt. Sinai with the words:

Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my
covenant, you shall be my own possession among all
the peoples; for all the earth is mine and you shall be
to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex.19:
5-6).

This covenant relationship leading to a just and
peaceful society was the aim of God's liberative act. Israel's
original covenant with Yahweh allowed no class distinc-
tions; a covenant faith in one God included the concept
of the brotherhood of all Israelites ... Social justice is an
indispensable part of the covenant responsibility[21].

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20. Rui de Menezes, "Social Justice in Israel's Laws", Biblebhasyam
(Malayalam) 1985, p, 105,
21. Jerome Biblical Commentary, on Amos, p. 245

The passionate denunciation of the pre-exilic prophets against the scandal of poverty and oppression in Israel witnesses poignantly to her failure to do so[22].

The book of Amos furnishes an accurate picture of contemporary society. An oppressive social pyramid had been constructed and class inequalities were having drastic consequences, the poor being victimized by the predatory rich... Amos, steeped in the Mosaic tradition, saw these egregious social injustices as the antithesis of the covenant spirit[23]. Israel's errant ways and the oppressive structures are brought to an end by the exile.

However, for deutero-Isaiah the return from Babylonian captivity is primarily a 'bringing back' (43:5), thereby emphasizing a 'second Exodus', and the remnant becomes the bearer of Israel's hope (Zeph. 3:12f) for the 'new heavens and the new earth'.

IV

For Israel the Exodus-experience which some of the tribes[24] had brought into the common heritage of faith of the 12 tribes was first of all a tremendous confirmation of the power of Yahweh. To this faith in Yahweh the deutero-Isaiah appeals when he announces to the exiles in Babylon the new Exodus, the new liberation (Ch. 40-55). This basic faith is expressed in popular ways by stressing the wonderful and awe inspiring deeds, amazing signs and the terrible plagues by which Pharaoh was forced to give in (Ex. 1-12)

The Exodus can be explained in other ways[25]. Attempts have been made to explain this miracle by natural phenomena, for example the hypothesis that it was a tidal wave caused either by a comet striking the earth or else

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22. George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical 'Poor' a Social Class ?", Vidyajyoti, August 1986, p. 339.

23. Jerome Biblical Commentary, On Amos, p. 245.

24. Scholars seems to agree that not all the tribes of Israel took part in the Exodus from Egypt. See, Manfred Weippert, the Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine, SCM Press, 1971; also Roland de Vaux, op.cit., pp- 475ff.

25. Roland de Vaux, op.cit., p. 382ff.

by a violent eruption of a distant volcano. But the question is why these natural phenomena were favourable or benevolent only to Israel? Only faith sees God at work in the historic intervention of Yahweh. This fact of temporal salvation is expressed in terms of faith and this explanation in turn deepens and strengthens their faith.

The narratives of the OT attribute every act of liberation to Yahweh. Von Rad analysing the literary genre of 'stories which have wars as their subject'[26] observes that God is spoken of as the one who throughout history fights wrathfully in defence of the oppressed.

Yet another theme that emerges from our analysis is that the biblical narrative is characterised by an interaction between the human and the divine — the self-revelation of Yahweh and the divine commission to Moses. The revelation of the name of Yahweh (Ex. 3:9-15) is connected with the mission of Moses, who had to obtain the Pharaoh's permission for the Israelites to leave Egypt (Ex. 3:10; Cf. 4:23 E)[27]. The intertwining of God's redemptive purpose for Israel with the reaction of his chosen vehicle forms the warp and woof of the call narrative[28]. The initial encounter between Yahweh and Moses reflects a remarkable mixture of ordinary elements of human experience with the extraordinary.

The call of Moses shows that there remains a human initiative which, far from being crushed, remains a constitutive element of the one who is being sent. The divine will seeks to transform the human, but the messenger continues to resist even after he has been given the mission. Even though initiated fully by God, a genuine human personality is incorporated. The one called can drag his feet, even elicit a comprimise in the divnie plan (Ex. 4:14), but finally he will speak for God inspite of

26. Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, trans. D. M. G. Stalker 2 Vols. 2. p. 378-79.

27. Roland de Vaux, op. cit., p. 359.

28. Brevard S. Childs, Exodus, (Old Testament Library), SCM Press p. 71-72.

himself (Ex. 4:15f)[29]. Thus history of liberation is a history of God inviting man to participate in his own liberation, calling and guiding him, instigating and encouraging him.

When the Bible speaks of Yahweh who liberates, its emphasis is not so much on God's power as on his will, on his purpose, on his presence with people who struggle for liberation[30]. This is a recurring theme in the theology of liberation, and to that extent the theology of liberation remains on biblical grounds. To neglect this aspect by emphasizing 'God Almighty' we will be running the risk of fatalism. Yahweh is not a god of history in the sense of Fate, excluding human activity or determining it. He is rather the ally of human beings in the struggle against fate, against the powers that determine humankind.

'Salvation' is primarily experienced as a liberation/deliverance from all that enslaves man, a salvation that is realised here on earth[31]. It needs to be emphasized that liberation does not come straight from heaven in a miraculous way independent of the response and active participation of the people concerned.

'When christians have enough courage to 'come out' of the present crippling structures, God Himself will provide them with new ones. It is not needed to have a street map of the promised land before one leaves Egypt'[32]. When the creeds of Israel speak of God's mighty deeds of liberation they want to mobilize people to a corresponding practice of further deeds in the same direction, trusting that God will be with them in the process as He was with Moses and the people.

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29. ibid. p. 73
30. Bastiaan Wielenga, op. cit., p. 69-70
31. Heinz Schurmann, in 'Theologie Der Befreiung' Internationale Theologenkommission, Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1977 (ed) Kar Lehmann, p. 62
32. Harvey Cox, The Secular city, p. 249

Social Justice, Primary Requisite
for Conversion from Social Sin

Introduction

Social justice is a rather recent concept[1]. It is a
permanent disposition or attitude in a person, which calls for
a constant endeavour to see that all men receive all that is
required to become fully human, to live in dignity and
equality. It goes beyond legal and commutative justice to
come to the aid of those who are economically and poli-
tically weak by fighting against all injustices that are em-
bedded in structures, institutions, societal attitudes and
practices. It imposes obligations upon the rich nations and
individuals to renounce justly acquired rights and possessions,
in so far as the need of the whole community and its indi-
vidual members require[2]. Social justice aims at establishing
the right social order (economic, political and cultural condi-
tions), which will allow every person to live a fully human
life. Hoarding up of goods and amassing of property,
without utilizing them for the common good, are examples
of violation of social justice. Emphasizing the significance
of social justice Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*
pleads: "We are all equally responsible for the under-
nourished peoples. Hence it is necessary to educate one's
conscience to the sense of responsibility. But if any one
has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet
closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide
in him (1 Jn 3:17). Justice and humanity demand that those
countries which produce consumer goods, especially farm

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1. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931
2. Bernard Haring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. I., Maryland, 1966, p.520

products, in excess of their own needs, should come to the assistance of those other countries where large sections of the population are suffering from want and hunger. It is nothing less than an outrage to justice and humanity to destroy or to squander goods that other people need for their very lives."[3] Our own Father of the Nation, Gandhiji puts it much more strongly: "I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything I do not need for my own immediate use and keep it, I thieve it from somebody else... If only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in the world, there would be no man dying by starvation in this world. But as long as we have this inequality, so long we are thieving."

Relation of social justice to Christian faith

A concern for social justice is an integral part of authentic Christian faith. Active concern for other human beings on a social level constitutes real faith in God. Faith is 'intimately linked and sometimes identified with love and this love is extended to love of neighbour'[4]. Faith that lacks this concern for the neighbour is incomplete and suspect. And 'neighbour' today has to include his *situation* in life. 'Faith is salvific only when it is translated into a praxis of love; today, this praxis rises above the merely personal and must assume a structural and social character'[5]. In fact faith and social justice are mutually constitutive. We cannot have the one without the other. God of the Bible, to whom faith is the response, in its foundational event, discloses God as Justice intervening in history to end slavery, abolish domination and set the oppressed free[6]. The purpose of God's activity is not to demonstrate power but to make justice reign. God of the Bible is one

3. Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* n. 161. trans., W.J. Gibbons, N.J., 1961.

4. Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, N.Y. 1985, p. 66

5. Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation*, N.Y. 1986, p. 85

6 Samuel Rayan, "Asia and Justice" in *Vidyajyoti*, August, 1986, p.359

who executes justice for the oppressed. To know God as liberator is to liberate, is to do Justice. Commitment to social justice is therefore the faith-response to this God as Justice. To practise social justice is to affirm the God of justice; to fail to do this,is to deny the God of justice. Each man is a temple of God. One who is an accomplice in torturing another whether by intentionally maintaining structures of oppression or by omitting to fight against them is denying the God of the Bible. He is destroying the image of God in whose pattern every person is created. 'Because every man is truly visible image of the invisible God and a brother of Christ, the Christian finds in every man God Himself and God's absolute demand for justice and love.'[7] This is why social justice is so crucial today. Without practising social justice, there is no entering God's Kingdom. Practice of social justice is the primary condition for the entrance into God's Kingdom. Jesus left little doubt about it as is clearly seen in Mt. 25:31-46. The summons of Jesus here is that primacy be given to the quest for justice of God's Kingdom. The 'other' to which Jesus directs his practice of love is a collectivity: the world of the poor — solidarity with them. So the modern translation of the parable of Mt. 25:31-46 is: 'I was hungry and you rallied people to back reserve grain legislation. I was in prison being beaten and you called for an investigation. I was ill-housed and you set up a group to analyze the local situation and to make suggestions or you provoked your parished to make critical advocacy pleas for my people'[8]. Such effective action is the adequate way of expressing love for the other than mere alms-giving. Social justice presupposes effective love which alone widens the horizon narrowed by the bias of social rank and induces the rich to renounce their privileges and justly acquired possessions. This type of love has historical characteristics that distinguish it from love in general. Love today thus takes the basic historical form of social justice. Because today in our society even the distribution of elemental necessities like food, shelter,

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7. *Justice in the World*, (Second Synod of Bishops 1971) Ch. II n.5
8. Francis X. Meehan, *Contemporary Social Spirituality*, N Y., 1983,p.59

medical care, loans, education, employment etc., is governed by various social structures. So where this justice is absent, love lacks content. Social justice is the efficacious, institutional and social realization of love. Love works *through* social justice[9]. Thus authentic practice of love today, has surely to do with social justice in the economic order and in social relationships. As the French theologian Chenu says, social justice is the new characteristic of charity.

But guided by the so-called Hellenistic concept of justice, borrowed into theology by Thomas Aquinas, traditional moral theology developed a concept of justice that unfortunately overemphasized individual 'rights' and focussed its attention on individual property rights. The resulting concept of justice thus tended to be too legalistic and very individualistic. It neglected the Biblical concept of justice which emphasizes the social dimension as is clearly seen in the Psalms, the Prophets and in Jesus' own preaching of God's Kingdom and its justice. In our times we must therefore ask anew how we can promote social justice. Refusal to take our neighbour, his situation and his problems seriously, is very definitely sinful. Ignorance of the plight of our neighbour (which is the minimum exigency of love) is likewise immoral. Today, justice is to be understood primarily as concernd with how society is structured and organized, how wealth, power, rights and responsibility are distributed at every level, i.e., local, national and international. Commutative justice — the kind of justice that deals with how individuals relate to each other — should be fitted into the wider pattern established by social justice for society as a whole. So, today, to act justly means above all to work towards building a society that is intrinsically just in which its structures are just. Not doing this actively or remaining neutral is tacitly maintaining the *status quo* of unjust structures and is therefore injustice.

Prevalent unjust structures

When we speak of unjust structures, we should first

9. Roger Haight, *Op.cit.*, p. 79

of all consider them in the world-wide context. Staggering
inequalities exist on the global level in the economic, poli-
tical and cultural structures of the world. At a global level
economic power has come to be concentrated in the hands
of the relatively small number of rich countries of the
industrialized North. While these countries enjoy prosperity
and wealth, others are struggling for survival in the midst
of misery, hunger and malnutrition[10]. Today 20% of the
world's population enjoy 80% of the world's goods. The
USA with 6% of the world's population, controls nearly 32%
of the gross national products of the world.   Western
Europe with 10% of the world's population, controls 26.6%
of the world's GNP. If USSR, Japan, and Eastern Europe
are included, we have 31% of the population having 85%
of the production. On the contrary, the poor nations which
are 69% of the world population have only 15% of the
world's combined GNP[11]. Or to put it differently, as
Professor Harold Wilson says: If the entire population of
the world were represented by 100 people living in one
village, then 84 people would be living in poverty, misery,
despair or oppression, 17 illiterate, 15 mal-nourished, 80 in
inhuman housing conditions. Furthermore, of these 100
people, 6 would be North Americans, who would use 35%
of the total village energy and 40% of the natural products
of the village; these 6 would own 50% of the total income
earned in the village[12]. This situation of injustice is not
due to fatal coincidence. They are direct results of the
existing social relations between people and of the so-called
'imperialism of money'.   The poor are poor because of
the way society is organized and structured.

It is now clear that as long as the basic structures

10. "In a world where 500 million people are seriously underfed, we
(USA) build Trident submarines at over a billion dollars a piece, so
that we can add fourteen of them to the 2,055 missiles and planes that
can launch 9,200 nuclear weapons, each of which is many times more
powerful than Hiroshima weapon" Francis. X. Meehan, *Op.cit.*, p, 96
11. Tissa Balasuriya, *Development of the Poor through the Civilizing of
the Rich*, Auckland, 1972, p. 29
12. Harold Wilsen,*World Hunger: Its claim on the American Conscience*,
Millwood. 1971, p. 41

of production, existing in trade relations and social structures, are maintained, any changes which can be made, will merely scratch the problem, leaving the essential facts untouched. Hence 'the vicious circle of poverty' in which the countries producing raw materials are trapped. Who owns the raw materials and natural resources? The vast bulk of the world's natural resources is actually owned by those who are already rich. Even the wealth of Ores and other products such as timber in Africa is owned by the so-called 'multinational Corporations'. On the one hand, there is the 'club of affluent nations' and, on the other hand, there is the group of poor countries. The world economic order has serious injustice built into it; there is lack of equality in the bargaining power between the rich and the poor.

Not only in the economic sphere, also in the political sphere this is the situation; there is the domination of the few. Although political domination is less direct now than during the colonial period, it is nonetheless effective. It works through different kinds of pressure blocs, arms sales and negotiations for loans. With the 'lie' of 'development' and hypocricy of 'foreign aid', these structural injustices are carried on today in subtle ways by the super powers in the cultural level too, we see this domination. Western domination and lifestyles have distorted the values and ways of life of most of Afro-Asian countries. It has uprooted the identity and traditions of these people.

In addition to the concentration of power in the economic, political and cultural spheres, something similar takes place in the less tangible sphere of communication, information and ideas. A relatively small number of people owns or controls much of world's mass-media; a few fashion designers decide what people will wear; and the form and content of education are under the control of a small elite. These few people or nations manage to exercise power by setting up organizations in economical, political and cultural spheres. By these organizations the decisions of those at the top are implemented at the various levels at the bottom of the society. These decisions determine how

the common people live their lives. Also the very way these organizations function manifests grave injustice. They concentrate all power at the top. They deprive ordinary persons of any effective control over the policies of these organizations in which they work.

Coming to the local level, let us have a glance of our own nation and see some of the prevailing structural in_ justices. Flagrant inequality exists in Indian economic order: 80% of the resources of India are controlled by 20% of our people of whom 5% are wallowing in wealth and luxury, In this 5% may be unfortunately included some of our ecclesiastical authorities. Exploitation of workers is carried out by an unjust wage system. Those who make Bournvita, Lactogen, Horlicks and other nutritious food items do not have even a square meal a day; those who weave beautiful Nylon garments and silk sarees have their daughters dressed up in rags; those who build palatial mansions for the rich live in stinking, rat-infested slums and pavements without a roof of their own over their heads. Discrimination of women goes on in large scale by some of our cultural customs and laws. Women are often insulted, raped and killed. The degradation towards them begins already from the womb. With the gruesome, strangulating dowry system, thousands of our poor sisters are led to their being booted out, or burned by their husbands. It is this savage custom that forces thousands of mothers to kill crudely their unwanted new-born female infants. Injustices are maintained by our barbaric Caste System which fixes status at birth, victimizes 26 million untouchables to suffer material impoverishment. Injustices thrive in our educational system which legitimizes the aspirations of only the elite and give full access to higher education only for the dominant groups. Even Church-run schools and colleges and other charitable institutions serve only the powerful who exploit the poor. Look at the injustice done to the bonded labourers, tribals and the ill-treatment meted out to them; Injustices are also carried out by our outdated legal systems, courts, police, who are supposed to be guardians of law and order. Various are the injustices perpetrated by the

policies and projects of our governments at the whims of
politicians who influence the budgets where great imbalances
are made by expenditure for useless needs. We can go
on with the list of 'the scourged Christs' of India, the
victims of structural injustices that are prevailing today in
our country. Structural injustice is related to personal in-
justice. In the first place unjust structures are creation of
individual persons. Sometimes we establish structures that
are unjust without really intending to do so, but normally
it is done very deliberately. Often by our silence we are
involved and support these structural injustices though per-
haps unwittingly. If we do not speak and act against them
we are supportive of them indirectly. All are responsible
for these injustices but the degree of responsibility corres-
ponds to the position one occupies in the social ladder.

Duty of committed Christians

In the face of such pervasiveness of structural evil
and injustice both at the national and international level,
there is a feeling of helplessness. Are we to succumb to
this feeling ? What should committed Christians do ? The
commitment of Christians must flow out of a feeling of
responsibility that comes from Christian faith, so that the
claim of social justice becomes a religious obligation for
all who profess Christian faith. Christian faith provides a
secure basis for social justice. It tells that God is really
the Father of all, and we are all brothers and sisters. 'That
communal (collective) origin already exceeds the individu-
alistic interpretation of faith. To become more and more
a child of God at the same time means to become more and
more a brother or sister of my fellow men. To believe means
at the same time to come nearer to God and nearer to men.
The biblical picture of an authentic human person is not
that of a rich man, nor that of a powerful one, nor of one
who is respected by others, but is the picture of the just
man who brings about justice as he is being justified by
God, and who is aware of his responsibility towards his
suffering brother and sister. God's coming to man means
healing, curing of man. The healed man also brings

salvation to his brothers and sisters, not only in his heart but also on the economic, political, cultural and social levels.'[13]

Besides, Christian faith is *Christic* in structure. It is a faith in God mediated through Jesus, which means 'one takes Jesus as the concrete medium of God to oneself; he is the disclosure of God, the place where and through which the ultimate meaning of reality, the world, human existence, history and God are revealed'[14]. The life of Jesus is the focus of this faith. Now Jesus' whole life is a disclosure of God and God's Kingdom. The central message of Jesus' preaching was the Kingdom of God or 'rule of God, the effective action of God in the world that would change the actual situation of human suffering by putting an end to history or radically changing it by the establishment of a new order ... Jesus' life and preaching was a challenge to be converted to this rule of God and to lead a life that was congruent with it'[15]. Jesus handed over his whole life to the Kingdom he stood for. His resurrection was the final and absolute affirmation of God to the message and life of Jesus. The meaning of resurrection is that the message of the Kingdom of God of this Jesus is God's message. So living out the Christian faith in practice consists of letting the meaning disclosed in Jesus' life and message illumine and transform our lives. It means a going out of, beyond the self, a self-transcendence in response to the gratuitous disclosure of God in Jesus' person and message. It involves making one's own central concern the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached and for which he lived. This means prophetically announcing and affirming, as Jesus did, the values of the Gospel — the values of brotherhood, justice and peace, and constructing 'graced' structures that will yield bread for the poor and denouncing the death-dealing structures of oppression. Anybody who fails to challenge the structural injustices is not really

13. From the Statement of the Episcopal Conference of Belgium *Mensen voor Europa*, Brussel, 1976
14. Roger Haight, *Op. Cit.*, p. 123
15. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

leading a life of Christian faith. 'As a message of salvation Jesus' life and resurrection are first of all a promise that this situation is not the end; God's Kingdom will come.'[16] So Christian faith is sustained by a hope in a promise that the Kingdom will come. Rooted in this hope and in the confident knowledge that God will bring about the Kingdom, a Christian forges ahead with creative acts of hope and justice for building up a new world. An authentic Christian faith thus merges with hope and active love of neighbour and demands these creative acts of hope and justice for building up a better world which becomes a preparation for the fullness of the reign of God.

The conclusion that emerges from what has been said is this: To be an authentic Christian, one has to involve positively in tackling the problems of structural injustices within one's reach. 'The big question that challenges Christians in every poor area is how to be true Christians, how to announce the joy of universal fraternity (because we are all children of the heavenly Father), in a world of wretches and exploited.'[17] In this direction, the first step will be to disentangle oneself from unjust structures and organizations in which one lives and then positively construct alternative structures that will promote the values of the Kingdom — values of social justice, fellowship and freedom. To be concrete, one has to be conscientized first of all about what are the values that should be present and should not be present in the new world that one is trying to create. Here the Kingdom values of justice, fellowship and freedom can be a guide. The next step would be combating unjust structures with the just and equitable structures that will embody the Kingdom values. And finally, before creating these alternative structures, one has to determine whether the methods by which one introduces these structures and institutions are appropriate[18].

Church v. structural injustice

The role of the universal Church in the face of the

16.   *Ibid.*, p. 137
17.   Leonardo Boff, *Op.cit.*, p.85
18.   Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*, N.Y,, *1984*, pp. 101-2.

'banality' of evil on the global level is not to cease from denouncing the gross injustices and exploitations among the nations. She must take a stand with the oppressed and the poor whatever the risks involved. As 'conscience of the world', she should stand out publicly in the world as a herald of the values of the Kingdom and support the concrete initiatives for building up a better world 'creating a mysticism of societal transformation as a way to concretize and anticipate here in the world the Kingdom of God beginning in the present and culminating in eternity'[19]. She should raise her prophetic voice to criticize the unjust structures, flagrant abuses of power and corruption on the global level. Silence or neutrality in this would be criminal on the part of the Church. The evils of capitalism, cut-throat competition, arms race — these are perhaps the beasts described in the Book of Revelations (Rev. 13: 1-7) and the Church should be fearless in calling them by their names. She should do all what she can for (what Pope Paul VI earnestly called for) an establishment of a world authority for justice, which would universally be recognized by all and capable of pursuing actions effectively in the areas of political and juridical concern. When the Church ceases to legitimize the positions of the powerful, and does not just 'make of Lazarus a guest at the table of the rich'[20], not just merely minister to the victims of society but seeks to help them overcome their victimization, then she may be defamed, persecuted, and even may have to die in the process. Let her die, then the Kingdom will have been born and she might no more be needed.

But the Church would risk hypocrisy when in denouncing the unjust structures in the world, if she does not react against the injustices and violations of human rights within her own institutions, such as discrimination against women by juridically making them incapable of leadership, inquisitorial censorship by which rights of the accused are not guaranteed and psychological tortures

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19. Leonardo Boff, *Op.cit.*, p.87
20. *Ibid.*, p.57

meted out to her subjects by ecclesiastical officials who are challenged or questioned. Also, before announcing the Kingdom values to the world, she should address herself to those values of justice, fellowship and freedom. Participatory style of leadership in the Church with a change in the relationship between those who hold authority and ordinary people would foster, for example, value of fellowship. Here it may be recommended that the bishops let go much of their power to share responsibility willingly and allow themselves to be challenged. The clergy should relinquish some of its power to parish councils. And in the male-dominated Church, it is minimum justice that Church should share leadership with women, who form half of her members and are more active in the Church services than men. They are the 'poor' in the Church because they are being deprived of effective responsibility. Also, Church leaders should be rescued today from the tendency to put most of their energy into building up massive institutions and wasting money on pompous celebrations, forgetting the wider human society. The Church should address herself to the urgent aspirations of people everywhere for their dignity and rights. With such ecclesial praxis, she should develop a 'communism of love' — the New Testament vision of the New Society markd by *koinonia* and *diakonia* (Acts 2:43-47; 4: 32-35; 5:12-16). The aim of the Church is to promote the Kingdom rather than to look after her own sectional interests. Church is for the Kingdom and sign and instrument of it. The possession and wealth that the Church has in the form of power and prestige are to be used to reverse those conditions of poverty that contradict the breaking in of the reign of God. Jesus asked to give all what one has to the poor in order to gain heaven. Church has not given much, rather by her possessions and wealth, she identifies herself with the culture of the rich and the ruling classes. The ethos prevailing in her religious institutions is one of affluency, cringing submission and dependence, while her secular institutions tend to reflect the values of bourgeois society. As the Brazilian Bishops

admitted: 'Caught in the nets of injustice prevailing in the world, how often has the Church played the game of the oppressors and favoured those who by their wealth and power are the strong ones to the detriment of the common good, and disfiguring sadly the message of the Gospel'.

New Church model

We should have an alternative model of the Church as a caring servant. 'The Church's task in the secular city is to be the *diakonos* of the city, the servant who bends himself to struggle for its wholeness and health.'[21] And as Avery Dulles observes: 'To be of service, the Church must work within the structures of the world rather than build parallel structures.'[22] If Church is servant, she must look around herself and outside of herself and see where the structural injustices and evil lie. She would find then the great disparity between rich and poor, white and black, educated and illiterate. She must then become the voice of the voiceless, the spokesman of the highest ideals of the Gospel, standing at the forefront in the struggle for justice and alleviation of poverty. More of Church's time, money and energy must be spent on the building of God's Kingdom than on the building and maintenance of her own institutions. She has to be a Church *of* the poor, *for* the poor and *with* the poor[23]. Only when we have an *ecclesiogenesis* of Church as Servant — a Christian community at the service of justice for all people in the world, only when she takes the servant shape of Christ around the needs, hopes and aspirations of the world, would she shine as a sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God.

All this would require first of all *conscientization* In order to disentangle oneself from unjust structures, one has to have an awareness of how our society functions and how it is structured and organized. Often one would find that society is structured in ways that is beneficial to a small group of the rich at the expense of a majority of the poor. Therefore each local exploitative situation has

21 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, N.Y., 1965, p.134
22. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, N.Y., 1978, p.102
23. Leonardo Boff, *Op.cit.*, pp.51-59

to be analyzed and studied and then the exploited has to be conscientized in order that they themselves work for their betterment and shape their destiny. Here the *Basic Kingdom Communities*[24] can be very effective and contribute very much. Basic Kingdom Communities would be communion of small groups of persons or families formed by some specific shared goals and living in more immediate and fraternal relationships. They are centered on the Scriptures of various religions. 'These Basic Communities can', as Fr. George Lobo says, 'first of all represent to a despairing world that a new society without discrimination, oppression and exploitation is possible. They can uphold and promote Gospel values like justice, fellowship and freedom.'[25]

These communities may gather twice a week, hear the words of Scripture, share their problems and bring the words of the Scripture which they listened to bear on their problems such as unemployment, housing problems or various exploitations to which they are subjected and decide as a group about what should be done to solve these problems. The basic Kingdom communities can take·up social questions of their surroundings, such as problem of drinking water, electricity, etc., and later on take a political stance towards the social structures. At this level they can participate in the struggle of the people to organize group projects, credit unions, housing societies, efforts to resist land take-overs and many other concerns of the society. One concrete example would be the starting of a trade union to ensure that its members are adequately paid, their rights are preserved and that they are consulted about the policy and decision-making of the company or factory in which they work. When such protective Unions sacrifice justice in society as a whole in order to pursue sectional interests of their members, investigation should

24. In India where one has to work with men of good will of various religions, instead of Basic Ecclesial Communities, it may be better to speak of Basic Kingdom (Ramarajya) Communities, which would be more acceptable to all (Lokasamgraha).

25. George V. Lobo, *The Church and Justice in India Today*, (Un published notes, JDV, Pune) p. 50

be done by the Community as to the effectiveness of them in embodying and promoting the Kingdom values of justice.

In this way, these Basic Communities can be small grass-root units of conscientization, social awareness, reflection and participatory action. Formation and ongoing animation of lay leaders of Basic Kingdom Community is a ministry of priority by the Church in the given situation of India. A network of such communities would also be the pattern of alternative political structures where the poor and the voiceless who get lost in bigger political parties can get voice and power through such small units and face the obstacle of unjust structures on their march to freedom[26].

The role of the Church in conscientization process is very significant. Her catechesis, educational services (both formal and non-formal) should be aimed at constructing alternative structures in building up of *Dharmic* Society and in inculcating the Kingdom values. The prophetic dimension of Sacraments, liturgy and especially of the Eucharist should be stressed. Celebrating Eucharist — the activation of the 'subversive' memory of Jesus — has to be re-thought and restructured in relation to social justice and human rights struggle. For by its very nature Eucharist is social. The earnest exhortation of the Synod of Bishops on Justice in the World 1971) is relevant here: 'The liturgy which we preside over and which is the heart of the Church's life, can greatly serve education for justice. For it is a thanksgiving to the Father in Christ, which through its communitarian form places before our eyes the bonds of our brotherhood and again and again reminds us of the Church's mission. The liturgy of the Word, catechesis and the celebration of the Sacraments have the power to help us to discover the teaching of the prophets, the Lord and the Apostles on the subject. The preparation of baptism

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26. From the Final Statement of the Seminar on "Creative Ministries Affirmative Action in Today's India" ed. Allwyn D'Silva, Pune, 1984 p. 210-11

is the beginning of the formation of the Christian conscience. The practice of penance should emphasize the social dimension of sin and of the sacrament. Finally, the Eucharist forms the community and places it at the service of men.'[27]

Renewal of theology

An alternative approach to theology must be developed to serve as guide in conscientizing people for social justice. Theology must meet the agony in the hearts of the poor and hunger in their bellies. We in India are still having vestiges of an old, Western, imported theology with a dehumanizing concept of God — a God up there in the clouds, who supports the Western imperialism. The God in this theology is not the God of Jesus, not the God who takes the side of the poor but the false God who gives legitimacy to injustice, a God who will not question, who will not ask 'Cain, where is your brother?'. A false notion of God has been invoked to justify colonial conquest, racism, gross exploitation of the poor by the rich and shameless abuses of political power. A distorted notion of providence with a fatalistic piety was demanding the poor people to accept their suffering as the will of God.

Besides, traditional theology has become so abstract and theoretical that it scarcely affects the everyday life. What is needed is a different way of theologizing which would be meaningful in the context of the realities of India resulting in a different kind of theology, a theology that clarifies concretely the practical implications and consequences of a belief in God and what is concretely Christian faith in our context. What is Christian faith concretely? It is belief in God as Father of all. God of the Bible as revealed by Jesus is a Father who is not so much interested in cult but who is profoundly concerned with human suffering and critical of the humanly constructed social conditions that cause it. He is on the side of the poor and of those who suffer and challenges all who

27. Justice in the World, n. 58

believe in Him to take this side. Christian faith thus, is believing in the mystery of sonship, i.e, brotherhood and sisterhood of all men and women. They cannot be children of God if they are not fully men or women. It means accepting the free gift of sonship in deed which has practical implication of making brothers and sisters of all men and women. It is the millions who call me 'Brother' or 'Sister' respectively that constitutes me a son or daughter of God[28]. Implication of such a faith is that every human person is thus the concrete *locus* of our encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ. The poor person, the other becomes the revealer of the 'Other'. Every other person is the 'lottery ticket vendor' who brings me the Big One. He is th e sacrament of God for me. The question then is not where we can find God, but where God Himself wants to be encountered by us. He wishes to be encountered in the faces of the humiliated, outraged persons, in the disfigured ones of men and women, who are victims of violence and oppression. It is difficult to recognize his visage in the faces of human beings who are ugly, disfigured by torture and creased by the lines of poverty. As on Veronica's towel -- the only photograph of Christ — his face is disfigured today too in the faces of the poor and downtrodden in whom he is hidden. Such a concept of God comes closer to life, affects our commitments, attitudes and even our feelings. Christian theology must be praxis-oriented[29]. It should ever show concretely how Christian categories and symbols reflect the values of the Kingdom of God and bear upon the task of the Christian for working for justice, human rights and promotion of the Kingdom and struggling against any oppression. It must be done from the perspective of the poor, 'from the underside of history' and the 'dimension of justice has to colour in some fashion the message of God being transmitted to man today'[30].

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28. Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom*, N. Y., 1977, p. 135
29. Kurian Kunnumpuram, "Theology in India at the Cross-Roads", in *Theologizing in India*, ed. Amaladoss et ali, Bangalore, 1981, p. 213
30. A. M. Varaprasadam, 'Theology Must Happen...' in *Theologizing in India*, p. 167

Solidarity with the victims of structural injustices is an imperative of any authentic Christian theology.

In this way, theology becomes a concrete (all the contextual realities) reflection on the praxis in the light of Christian faith-experience. As Gutierrez says 'theology is always the second act, the first act is commitment to a life of justice and to the struggle of the 'wretched of the earth'. As people live out and reflect on that commitment, a theology emerges. Such a theology would help greatly everyone in the conscientization process to transform the human community into the household of God — the Kingdom of God.

Alternative spirituality

Speaking of alternatives what is more importantly needed today is an alternative spirituality. Only when a Christian is formed and shaped by a genuine Christian spirituality, he would be moved spontaneously to work for social justice and struggle against structural oppressions. A good deal of older spirituality was "private" and over-emphasized the personal level (an interior life of prayer and asceticism) at the expense of the interpersonal and structural level. A truly Christian spirituality must penetrate all levels of human existence: the personal (or *intra*personal), *inter*personal and public (or structural) levels and there should be an integration and a proper balance of all the three levels[31]. The older spirituality encouraged one to seek inner peace as an escape from social injustices rather than seek it in the midst of the struggle for justice. It was "dichotomic" insofar as "spiritual" or "holy" meant that one should not be involved in political or worldly affairs. It did not give priority to structural or social justice. With its high emphasis on submission and obedience, it tended to support the societal structures in which there was so much inequality and considered it as something God-given which in no way should be questioned.

There is therefore a tremendous need today, for an

31. Donal Dorr, Op. cit., pp. 8-18: Cf. also F. X. Meehan, Op. cit., p.

alternative spirituality. There is to be emphasized the poli-
tical or structural dimension of spirituality which was greatly
neglected in the past. What is needed today, is a spiri-
tuality of justice that would encourage people to challenge
the inequality in the existing orders of the society and
work for radical changes which would embody the King-
dom values in the society. The test of this spirituality is
how one works for the removal of the unjust structures
that oppress the poor and downtrodden. ''The Bible leaves
no room for doubt that in God's eyes to be just is to safe-
guard and respect the rights of the poor, the oppressed,
and the vulnerable (eg. Is 10:1-2; Amos 8:4-6; Lev. 25:10-47;
Mt 15:6; 20:13.16; 25:35.37; Lk 4:18; 16:19-31; 20:47; James
2:1-9). But it is not enough !for me to feel called by my
God to be concerned for the poor; I must enable the poor
themselves to experience God as *their* God, the God
who is on their side to protect them against op-
pression, the God who "puts down the mighty and
exalts the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things
and sends the rich away empty" (Lk. 1:52-53)[32]. If this is
so, spirituality and prayer become a political act where
we commit ourselves to social justice. A way should be
found to combine a contemplative approach to life with a
commitment to social justice. We have to be *pilgrim
contemplatives* whose goal is not merely to find God in all
things, but to work to advance His presence and visibility
in all things. We have to be *sent contemplatives*. Christian
mysticism is a mysticism of fraternity. For the God of
Christian faith is a Father and is found only in the move-
ment of his love toward men, the ''least'' as is revealed
to us in Christ. Only by letting ourselves into this move-
ment do we merge into God. True Christian spirituality
thus means going beyond self to ''others'', breaking the
immanence of our selfishness and thus touching upon the
movement toward the very transcendence of God. The
characteristic of such a spirituality is a commitment to the
poor for bringing justice to them and for removing the

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32. Donal Dorr, *Op. cit,*, p. 16

structural injustices of which they are victims. It is thus in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed through concrete works in the midst of the struggle for justice that one realizes one's encounter with the Lord (Mt. 25:31-46).

Such a spirituality of justice would demand from everyone an option for the poor, which would in turn demand a "conversion which means a clear break with the values of one's class and society, which may lead to a change of residence and demand a new level of commit_ ment to the struggle to create conditions for a decent life for the poor, new options, new solutions"[33]. Such an option is first of all a sacrament "of protest against the structures of injustice in which one lives, because one voluntarily relinquishes the privileges that these structures offer one while depriving the poor of their basic rights. Secondly, such an option and solidarity with the poor would necessarily force one to change one's priorities and con_ cerns and would claim a great deal of time and energy to develop a new society that is structurally just. In this commitment one may even be offered the privilege of per_ secution, calumny and even death — close identification with Jesus Christ crucified. Such is the asceticism this spirituality would demand from an authentic Christian.

Such a spirituality would demand from the Religious, who have taken the vow of voluntary poverty that they move to the margins of the society. Living at the centre of the society leads one to certain aping of the accepted unjust social values of the society. It is a scandal that many religious Congregations are now firmly set at the centre of social respectability in both their works and lifestyle. To live on the margins of the society reminds the Religious that they exist for people and that they are sign of God's loving concern and mercy and that their vow of poverty is for the sake of the Kingdom. Living on the margins, there is a fear that the Congregations may die gradually. This is because one has a negative view of death. Seed

33. George Therukattil, "Conscience, Voice of the Voiceless", in Indian Theological Studies, Vol. XXII March, 1987, p. 60

must fall into the ground and die in order to rise again to new and greater life. The Religious Congregations, by virtue of the communal commitment to poverty have to learn how to be small, insignificant and even to die. To die then is the greatest challenge of this spirituality to the Religious life today.

In conclusion, such a spirituality demands from every Christian, choosing a Gospel lifestyle reflecting the simplicity of Jesus' life. A life of simplicity means a frugal, moderate use of goods and a radical break from the pattern of over-indulgence, consumerism, and reckless waste. It would mean rethinking all our possessions and cutting them down, a change in one's style of dressing, housing, travelling, recreation and eating habits — all for the good of others. "Such an altered lifestyle enables us to consider what we truly value in life, how we measure success, where we live, what we eat, how we use energy, how we invest our lives and resources, and where and how we travel. In short, we are challenged to live more simply that all may simply live."[34] "Such a lifestyle marked by voluntary simplicity is also a good starting point for all people who want to make an option for the poor but feel frustrated because they do not know where to begin."[35] Changes of lifestyle symbolize one's commitment to radical change and are a constant reminder to oneself of the need for, and the possibility of, an alternative world. They can also affect other people, making them question themselves about their values and way of life."[36] It is an obligation of Christian faith and justice that every one adopts this lifestyle of voluntary simplicity, if the poor are to have a just share of the limited resources of the earth.

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34. *Report* of 1978 Mission, 118th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in USA, quoted in Constituency Education Pilot Program Church World Service, 1979, p. 90
35. Donal Dorr, *Op. cit.*, p. 144-5
36. *Ibid.*, p. 145

Collective Sin

Collective guilt

Five million Jews were exterminated in Nazi Germany. For a long time after the Second World War, there was a wave of guilt feeling among the mass of Germans. They also experienced an obligation of repairing in any way they could. They strongly supported the new State of Israel and readily paid up huge amounts as reparations to the nascent State. When in turn the State of Israel violated the right of Palestinians to their homeland and waged wars to expand its frontiers, the West German State supported these ventures. The Germans thought that it was a way of making up for the horrid past. But now the responsibility of the German nation as a whole for the Nazi atrocities is more and more questioned. Not only the neo-Nazi elements, but also the majority Christian Democratic Party hold that all the German people cannot be considered guilty for the horrors perpetrated at the instigation of the hard core Nazis[1]. But can the German nation absolve itself of the responsibility?

Such a question of collective responsibility arises in many cases, for instance, in that of West Pakistan for the death of millions of people of the erstwhile East Pakistan, in that of Western nations for colonial exploitation, including the extermination of vast numbers of indigenous people in the Americas, or in that of the higher castes in India for the disabilities of the lower. Should the members of the 'oppressing classes' feel guilty? Is it proper to impute the evil to all the members of a class? Is the oppressing

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1. See *Tablet*, May 4, 1985, pp. 449-450

class obliged to collective restitution or reparation for the crimes ? These are some of the questions that constantly crop up while reflecting on mass crimes or situations of injustice.

In this matter, two extremes are to be avoided. The spontaneous tendency to blame a whole group of persons for certain crimes should be curbed. For instance, if some people from a particular community like the Sikhs indulge in terrorist activity, the whole community should not be branded as terrorist, nor every member suspected as such. One should not easily speak of collective guilt as if every member of the group is equally or fully responsible for the crimes[2]. This leads to the creation of stereotypes and fomenting of group hatreds which result either in counter-violence or in displacing the violence on to other groups. On the other hand, the members of a group cannot easily disown responsibility for injustices committed by their leaders or for those arising from unjust systems from which they profit.

Personal sin and social sin

The Christian idea of sin, as both personal and social, is here presupposed. The scriptures clearly indicate the two aspects and their close interrelationship. It is true that until recently a too privatized or individualistic idea of sin was prevalent in the Church. Even the doctrine of Original Sin was explained as an inheritance from the sin of the first Adam

Now it has become a commonplace to talk about 'structural evil' or 'sinful situations'[3]. If at all sin is in some sense inherited, it is, as G. Baum remarks, 'mediated

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2. See P. Schoonenberg, "Sin", in *Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. by K. Rahner New York, Herder and Herder, 1968, Vol. VI, p. 90

3. Cf. S. Arokiasamy, 'Sinful Structures in the Theology of Sin", *Vidya Jyoti*, 49(1985)486-501; B. Keraus, *Sinful Social Structures*, New York, Paulist Press, 1974; B. Haring, *Sin in a Secular Age*, Slough, St. Paul Publications, 1974; and my book *Christian Living according to Vatican* II, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1982, pp. 452-457; (American ed., *Guide to Christian Living*, Westminster, Md., Christian Classics, 1974, pp. 404-410).

through the unresolved conflicts of parents and families as through the discrepancies of institutional life into which infants are born and in which they grow up[4].

Social sin has several levels[5]. The first level is made up of injustices and dehumanizing trends built into various social, political, economic and at times even religious institutions which embody people's collective life. A second level is made up of the cultural and religious symbols that legitimate and reinforce these influences, for example, by persuading people that the source of evil is only in the hearts of individuals. On a third level, it refers to the false consciousness through which people involve themselves collectively in evil actions as if they were doing right and any questioning of the profit-oriented, dominant culture is evil. Lastly, it is made up of the collective decisions generated by the distorted consciousness which perpetuate and aggravate the dehumanizing trends.

Thereby the dialectical relationship between personal and social sin is manifested. The unjust structures arise from sinful inclinations and actions of some. These unjust structures in turn pervert the consciousness of the masses and create an environment for a host of personal evil actions. The rich and the powerful are inclined to misuse their positions and power to the detriment of the poor, who in turn are inclined to anger and despair that can often aggravate the situation. Without minimizing personal freedom and responsibility, we can say that most individual crimes are grounded in particular social conditions.

Responsibility of individuals for social sin

Social sin then is the result of accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. The Second Document on Liberation states: ''Having become his own centre, sinful man tends to assert himself and to satisfy his own desire for the infinite by the use of things, wealth, power and pleasure, despising other people and robbing them

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4. *Religion and Alienation*, New York, Paulist Press, 1975 p. 193.
5. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202

unjustly and treating them as objects or instruments."[6]

As member of a group, class, community or nation, each person has obviously solidarity with all other members. So no one can say he has nothing to do with the actions or crimes of others in the same group. But how far is he or she responsible for their evil deeds?

First of all, each person has the duty of gaining awareness of all the crimes committed by the leaders of the group, of analysing their deeper causes and also of examining to what extent he or she himself contributes to them. The actions of the leaders are often reflections of the attitudes prevalent in the group. Thus the cruel imperialistic interventions of the American leaders in Vietnam, Chile or Nicaragua may have expressed the general tendencies in the majority of the population for world domination and for having a good life at the expense of others. The ordinary person may not want brutal oppression of other peoples. But is he or she ready to renounce the desire of his or her nation having a privileged position in international politics and trade?

Many of the massive crimes in the world are committed in the name of protecting democracy, free trade and even Christian civilization. Yielding to such propaganda by the organs of the military-industrial complex would often betray either gross naivity or subtle bad will. Not wanting to face the issues would be a sign of lethargy or of complicity. The Swiss are prospering through the colossal amounts invested in their banks by profiteers in poor countries through secret numbered accounts. What use is democracy if the system cannot be changed by reforming the law that permits such international exploitation? Is it enough to donate some milk powder and cheese to the poor?

As soon as one is aware of the social crimes committed by one's leaders against other people, one is bound to

6. S. C. for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on *Christian Freedom and Liberation*, March 22, 1986 No. *42*

dissociate oneself from them. One should cease in any way to contribute to them. One should also condemn them even if the actions or existing situations are beneficial to oneself. Thus the British people would have the strict obligation to try to end speedily the inhuman system of Apartheid in South Africa even if thereby their massive investments would be endangered. They cannot just leave the vital decisions in this matter to a government led by people with imperialist, racist and opportunist mentality.

Nearer home in India, one has to condemn the lethargy or even the complicity of government officials regarding matters like bonded labour, corruption and caste oppression. As soon as anyone has attained consciousness of a grave evil situation, he or she is bound to do every-thing possible to counteract it. Salving one's conscience by occasional gestures of good will like gifts to the poor or contributions to charitable schemes is insufficient. At times it may even be a sign of hypocrisy when one seeks honour or publicity for such munificence.

Many pious people desist from speaking out or doing anything under the cloak of piety. There can be no neutrality in such matters. Silence or indifference itself is a form of complicity, especially when evil structures benefit one directly or indirectly. Taking refuge under the plea of the impossibility of changing the system is only a way of sidestepping the effort and sacrifice called for. It is true that if only one person speaks out, not much will be achieved. But the initiative of one can move many and then things can change.

Social responsibility and collective guilt

There is no doubt about the solidarity of individuals with the groups to which they belong. The Bible strongly emphasizes this solidarity, especially in the case of leaders. Thus Moses asks God to punish him for the sins of the people (Ex 32:32). That there is an element of a vengeful God or a too human conception of retribution here is less o the point than the picture of solidarity. This is even clearer in the passage in Second Isaiah concerning the

Suffering Servant of Yahweh: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; ... But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed ... And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"(53:4-6). Here we have the idea of 'corporate personality'. St. Paul applies it to the Old and New Adam: "Thus as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." (Rom 5:19)

From the idea of social solidarity and responsibility we cannot immediately conclude to collective guilt if this is understood as the imputability of the crimes of some to others in the group. Imputability arises, to the extent particular members someway, by acts of commission and omission, personalize the evil or contribute to the evil.

Otherwise, a generalized conception of collective guilt would lead to the hardening of antagonisms between rival groups. Class struggle would lead to class hatred which, under no circumstances, is legitimate. The warnings of the Magisterium against class struggle are to be taken in this sense. For instance, the Second Document on Liberation declares; "The special option for the poor, far from being a sign of particularism or sectarianism, manifests the universality of the Church's being and mission... This is the reason why the Church cannot express this option by means of reductive sociological and ideological categories which would make this preference a partisan choice and a source of conflict."[7]

The class struggle is a fact of life. Anyone who seeks to bring about justice will have to side with the cause of the poor. But this does not mean that those who belong to the richer classes should be looked upon as enemies or necessarily held guilty for the evils in society. There should be no element of personal hatred or of judging the consciences of people to whatever class they

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may belong. Judgement regarding the heart of man belongs to God alone.

Confession and social sin

Until now, sacramental confession has been almost uniquely concerned with individual faults from the point of view of the particular penitent. Even sins against charity were confessed in order to obtain 'purification of heart' and hence for the individual good of the penitent. This is one of the main reasons why the practice of confession today looks less relevant to people, especially to those who are committed to justice and social change. They do not see how it helps them in their commitment. They are also increasingly disaffected to a practice that does not seem to have any tangible effect on the pious who perpetuate the unjust structures in the world.

Hence there is urgent need for reform in this matter. The social dimension of every sin should be stressed. This was noted quite a long time ago by K. Rahner[8]. Sins that more directly affect social life and relationships like the violations of human rights need special attention. Groups must be made to see their solidarity in evil and their common responsibility to bring about change in social structures.

This should evidently be the focus in community celebrations of the sacrament. Such celebrations should be directed to this social purpose and not to induce greater guilt feelings by means of mass suggestion. However, the social dimension should not be lost sight of in individual celebration or private confession. Rather, this should provide the occasion to go deeper into one's social responsibilities.

Regret for compromise

We have already seen that in an atmosphere of generalized corruption, people may be confronted with

8. See "Forgotten Truths concerning the Sacrament of Penance", in *Theological Investigations*, London, Darton. Longman ade Todd, 1963, vol. 11, pp. 136-140

many conflict situations. If this leads to compromises, how far is there reason for conscientious regret?

Those who subscribe to the distinction between 'moral' and 'non moral evil' in human acts also speak of the difference between a justified compromise called for by the vicissitudes of finitude and history and one called for by factors which are the products of sin[9].

Sin conditioned compromise would involve the objec_tivised results of evil and hence some part of these results enters into what is actually done and thereby the evil is actually prolonged. Hence this would create a specific motive for a genuine and conscientious regret. Paying a bribe as speed money for facilitating a legitimate cause would be an example. According to this view, such a regret is not called for when a compromise is done only due to *de facto* incompatibility of goods or values arising from the limitations of human values and complications of history.

However, others would admit 'moral evil' whenever there is question of basic human values[10]. Thus there would be place for conscientious regret whenever one has to choose a lesser evil in conflict situations. Besides, it would be difficult in practice to make a distinction between 'moral evil' and 'non moral evil' when basic moral values are compromised.

Hence, whenever objective injustice is involved, even if it is not feasible immediately to overcome it or there is no other way of avoiding a greater evil other than to cooperate, there would be reason for personal regret.

Reparation

The question of reparation for collective evil may arise in several ways. At times the State may levy a *collective fine* on all the inhabitants of a village when they

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9. Cf. J. Fuchs, *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality*, Washington, Georgetown Univ. Press, 1983, pp. 158-159
10. Cf. *Christian Living*, pp. 141-145

do not seem to be willing to cooperate in the curbing of a social crime, for example by the surrender of persons who have committed a crime against the lower castes. This should be used sparingly and only as a last resort. Often the real culprits are not likely to amend, and many innocent people who are unable to resist them may be unduly penalized.

Reprisals are not to be approved of as they are a form of torture. The Second Document on Liberation declares in this regard: "One can never approve, whether perpetrated by established power or insurgents, crimes such as reprisals against the general population, torture or other methods of terrorism"[11]. Such methods are an offence against human dignity and rights, and are likely only to aggravate the situation.

But what about *restitution for collective crimes*. When one nation has colonised or exploited another, it is not enough just to end the process. A nation state is a moral person recognized as such by international law. Hence the classical principles for restitution for unlawful expro_priation or damage apply here. The obligation is in strict or commutative justice and hence may not be evaded under any pretext. Otherwise, the crime will be perpetuated. Here collective guilt arises, not in the sense of mass guilt feelings, but as an expression of collective responsibility to repair the harm done.

The manner, extent and degree of exploitation has to be carefully studied. It has to be evaluated in monetary terms. The governments of exploited countries must draw up the bill and exploiters must pay it up after presenting their case and honest negotiations. The principle of 'limi_tation', that is the non availability of legal redress after a lapse of time does not apply here as it is a question of debts from which one is never morally freed merely by lapse of time.

Something like this has been frequently done in history

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under the title of 'war reparations'. But, alas, it is the victors who have made the vanquished pay as if victory alone gives a moral right to justice!

Now there is need of arousing the conscience of mankind in such a way that the powerful will be made to pay. The United Nations and the World Court would have to move in this direction.

To some extent the exploiters have agreed to pay in the form of 'aid'. However, it is becoming manifest that this is only another form of exploitation, though more subtle and under the guise of altruism and human solidarity[12]. The receiving nations have become more and more indebted and in the process are gradually losing their freedom. 'Aid' is used as a means of gaining influence over vital sectors of the economy of poor countries and control over their political processes. This crime calls for further reparations! The pious elements in poor receiving countries may abet the crime by fostering a spirit of false 'gratitude' and furthering the interests of the exploiters. There is need for gaining an awareness of the whole process so that the poor are not oppressed in the name of 'aid',

What is said here on the international level is also true on the local level. Those who have exploited the poor have to make compensation. They must be ready to give up their privileged positions. They must be prepared to pay higher taxes so that funds may be available for the uplift of the masses. This is a matter of strict justice which cannot be evaded. Of course, the rich may not spontaneously agree to compensate by means of redistribution of wealth. On 'the one side, a vast educative effort must be made. At the same time organized pressure has to be built up. Hence the relevance of mass movements.

Conclusion

Besides what is now recognized as 'social sin', there is the question of 'collective sin' and 'collective guilt'·

12. See my book, *Moral and Pastoral Questions*, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1985, pp. 141-145

This does not arise just because a number of people in one group commit a crime against another, but to the extent the crime is personalized by the members of the offending group.

Human solidarity implies common responsibility. Hence members of a group have the obligation to see that crimes are not committed by their leaders or in their name even when it results in some advantage to them. They have to examine how far they are personally responsible for abetting them, by acts of commission or of omission. They have to regret this complicity.

Sacramental confession must embrace this aspect of collective responsibility and must lead to amendment and the repairing of the damage done. Not only community celebration, but also private confession must take this factor into consideration.

When one group has exploited another, it has the strict obligation to repair according to the classical principles of restitution. This point needs to be brought into clearer focus.

So the idea of collective guilt is not meant to induce mass guilt feelings but be an expression of corporate responsibility. It should not lead to guilt feelings which indirectly lead to other crimes but to the establishment of justice.

Ideally the realisation of collective responsibility and reparation for social crimes is to be realised by an educative process. But organised pressure may be required to see that those who have enriched themselves at the expense of others are made to see their responsibility.

The idea of collective guilt should not lead to depreciation of a whole people as it happened in the case of Jews for many centuries. In any case there should be no room for collective or mass hatred. The ultimate goal is universal justice and reconciliation.

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Theology of Social Sin

I. The Nature of Social Sin

A. History of the concept of social sin

For the historical development of the understanding of social sin I shall draw on the insightful studies of Peter Henriot and Michael Sievernich[1]. The prophetic struggle of Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas provides us with a contextual understanding of social sin. In the golden age of the New World conquest, he compaigned against avarice, which had replaced pride as the first of the eight capital sins. As a pastor he tried to refine the consciences of his countrymen by applying the Church's penitential discipline. In his book "Confessario" he insisted on the duty of restitution in the case of damage done by plunderers, colonists, slave-owners and arms-dealers. Moreover he fought legally against the sinfully contrived system of "ecomienda", still the core of the colonial economy, and pressed the distant Emperor to make structural changes of a legislative nature. His struggle concerned sin both in its individual and social manifestations.

What las Casas seems to have anticipated, the liberation theologians and the magisterium clarified conceptually in terms of social sin. The power of structures for evil was recognized in Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*, in his discussion of "socialization"[2]. The relation of structures to sin was subsequently developed by Vatican II. The Council which introduced the complex problems relating to sin into its Pastoral Constitution states, on the one hand, that

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1. Peter Henriot, "The Concept of Social Sin", *Catholic Mind*, October 1973, pp. 38-53; Michael Sievernich, "'Social Sin' and Its Acknowledgement", *Concilium*, 190 (2/1987) pp. 52-63
2. Paragraphs 59-67

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reason, will, freedom and creativity are maimed by sin[3], but emphasizes, on the other hand, that sin distorts the world and throws history into disarray[4]: "Without doubt frequent upheavals in the social order are in part the result of economic, political, and social tensions. But at a deeper level they come from selfishness and pride, two things which contaminate the atmosphere of society as well. As it is, man is prone to evil, but whenever he meets a situation where the effects of sin are to be found, he is exposed to further inducements to sin, which can only be overcome by unflinching effort under the help of grace"[5]. This passage cogently links structures and sin. The conciliar texts themselves do not as yet feature the term "social sin", which nevertheless appears in an early commentary on the Pastoral Constitution[6].

What the Council left in the air was taken up by theological discourse in Latin America. In the first systematic draft of a theology of liberation, Gustavo Gutiérrez defined sin as a social and historical fact: "Sin is tangible in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of human beings by other human beings, in the domination and enslavement of peoples, races and social classes. Therefore sin appears as fundamental alienation, as the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation."[7]

A major advance in the development of social theology and social sin came from Protestant thinkers. In July, 1966, at Geneva, the World Council of Churches Conference on Church and Society began grappling with the theology of revolution, with the fact of violence in the modern world, and with the Christian's relation to violence. The problem of violence necessarily raises the structural issue, which has to do with the ways of life. If the system is oppressing human dignity, then it is itself doing violence to the oppressed. This

3. Numbers 15, 17, 37, 78
4. Numbers 39, 40   5. Number 25
6. W. Weber and A. Rauschek, "Die menschliche Gemeinschaft" in: Die Kirche in der Welt von Heute. Unter suchungen und Kommentare zur Pastoralkonstitution 'Gaudium et Spes' des II Vaticanische Konzils, ed. G. Barauna, Salzberg, 1967, p. 184
7. Teologia de la liberacion, Salamanca, 1972, p. 237

violence by political, economic and social structures -- despite its seeming legality, its subtle nonviolent appearances, its projection by the ruling powers as part of the unchangeable *status quo* -- is the situation which provokes the action of revolutionaries who seek to remove the unjust structures. The World Council of Churches' meeting recognized that for many in the world, especially in the developing countries, the question was one of meeting violence with violence. The real authors of disturbance are identified not as those who hunger and thirst after justice but those who, to protect their privileges, prevent justice by maintaining the structures of oppression. Two years later in April 1968, the Beirut Conference on "World Cooperation for Development" again returned to the problem of unjust structures. Sponsored by SODEPAX, this conference emphasized that "our responsibility is not merely as persons for other people, but also for the political and economic structures that bring about poverty, injustice and violence. Today our responsibility has a new dimension because men now have the power to remove the causes of the evil, whose symptoms alone they could treat before."[8]

The relationship between the structures of oppression and sin was made explicit at Beirut: "We know the reality of sin and the depth of its hold on human beings, and on our political and economic structures."[9] Injustice was seen sometimes to be "so embedded in the status quo" that violent revolution might be justified to bring about change[10].

In his 1966 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI spoke of the fact that "men are easily induced to use force to fight against the wrong done to human dignity", especially when "it is a question of manifest and lasting tyranny that damages the primary rights of the human person and inflicts serious harm on the common good of the country."[11]

In late August and early September 1968, the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops met at

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8. *World Development*: *The Challenge to the Church*, Geneva: SODEPAX 1968, **p.** 15
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17   10. *Ibid.*, p. 20   11. Paragraph 31

Medallin, Columbia. The conference opened with an address
by Paul VI, who warned that Christians "cannot be linked
with systems and structures which cover up and favour grave
and oppressive inequalities among the classes and citizens
of one and the same country."[12]   The discussions referred
to those systems and structures as being forms of "internal
colonialism" (the domination of the poor classes by the rich
classes) and "external neocolonialism" (the domination of
the poor countries by the rich countries). Again and again,
the power of structures was emphasized, and the need to
transform them stressed.

The concluding statement of Medellin was very ex-
plicit about injustice embedded in structures: "The Chris
tian) recognizes that in many instances Latin America finds
itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called
institutionalized violence ... violating fundamental rights."[13]
The realities of this injustice were clearly said to constitute
a "sinful situation"[14]. The General Secretary of the Con-
ference, Bishop Eduardo Pironio emphasized: "It is evident
that in the Latin American reality there exists a "condition
of sin" that ought to be transformed into a reality of
justice and sanctity."[15]

The direction of thought on structures and sin, which
was set forth at Medellin, found its underpinning in the
works of several Latin American theologians who discussed
the "theology of liberation".

Social sin became an explicit topic of the Second Roman
Synod. True, the synodal statement never uses that precise
term, but it refers repeatedly to "personal sin and its con-
sequences in social life", "unjust structures", "sin in its
individual and social manifestations", "the social dimension
of sin". Incidentally the Canadian bishops do mention
"social sin" in their statement issued at their April 17-21,
1972, meeting in Ottawa[16].

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12. *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in
the Light of the Council*, Washington, 1970, 11, 31
13. *Ibid.*, 78   14. *Ibid.*, 71   15. *Ibid.*, 1, 112
16. *Catholic Mind*, October, 1972, pp. 57-61

In the synodal debate itself, the theme of social sin appeared frequently. Cardinal Tarrancon of Spain was very clear: "It is true that the Church's mission begins with liberating man from sin. But it does not end there. Moreover, colonialism, cultural and economic domination, oppression of the weak — all these are really and truly social sins." Cardinal Flahiff of Winnipeg stated: "Christianity liberates. It liberates from sin — not only personal sin, but also, and perhaps chiefly, from social sin, since social sin, like original sin, creates a situation wherein individual sin becomes easy and acceptable." One other strong voice which emphasized this theme was that of Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht: "The number of injustices deriving from man's behaviour and from the institutions created by man are growing. Unjust economic and political structures constitute a "close at hand" occasion to commit sins of individual and particularly collective injustice. An unjust situation becomes a grave sin at the moment in which one becomes aware of it and refuses to exert oneself to change it. Conversion of heart is indispensible but this should arrive at the point of strongly wishing to bring about the change of situations which are objectively unjust". The result of such input into the synodal debate is evident in the final text of "Justice in the World". The bishops are moved by "the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures", and remind the Church that her mission for the redemption of the human race includes "its liberation from every oppressive situation."[17]

The discussion of social sin is something for which many of the Catholics were not prepared. This fact was acknowledged by the bishops at the Synod in their general debate and summed up as follows: "How is it, after 80 years of modern social teaching and two thousand years of the Gospel love, that the Church has to admit her inability to make more impact upon the conscience of her people ? ... It was stressed again and again (in the debate) that the faithful, particularly the more wealthy and comfortable among them, simply do not see structural social injustice

17. Introduction

as a sin, simply feel no personal responsibility for it and no obligation to do anything about it. Sunday observance, the Church's rules on sex and marriage tend to enter the Catholic consciousness profoundly as sin. To live like Dives with Lazarus at the gate is not even perceived as sinful."[18] The Puebla document of 1979 talks of individual and social sin in the same breath, as it were, and clearly emphasizes social sin, which is understood as the "objectification of sin in the economic, social, political and ideological-cultural fields"[19]. Finally, with the apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* of John Paul II (1984) for the first time a document of the magisterium began to talk explicitly of social sin[20].

B. General concept of social sin

With reference to its object, social sin is generally defined as an evil act that has adverse effects on society. Social sin is a deliberate act that harms the common good. This definition seems to be good as far as it goes but does not appear to situate the sinfulness of the world at its deepth. We are still very close to personal sin. We are likely to get a better understanding of social sin if we explain it in terms of its subject. What specifies social sin is that its subject is a collectivity. Sin is social in the sense that it is the whole group rather than an individual that sins. Social sin is not so much a particular action as a whole unjust and sinful system in a community for which the community is responsible. What is proper to social sin is that it hardly involves individual deliberation, free choice and guilt in the ordinary sense. In social sin generally people are guilty of destructive actions without full awareness.

A society is more than its individual members. It has a life of its own with its laws and institutions, customs and values. Through these mechanisms it imposes on us by

18. Parrgraph 7
19. III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano; Puebla; *La Evangelizacion en el presente y en el gutoro de America Latina*, Bogota, 1979; p, 1113
20. Number 16.Cf: *AAS 77 (1985)* pp. 213:217

way of inciting us to do what we ought not to do, and lulling us into not doing what we ought to do. Accordingly that they are capable of sinning on their own without our direct participation or approval, is beyond doubt. In the words of Gregory Baum, there are processes and structures among us that multiply evil and spread destruction vastly exceeding the harm that can be done by individual choices. Evil establishes itself profoundly in human history and is perpetuated by forces which, in part at least, seem to escape immediate personal control. Baum points to the political order and notes that the behaviour of certain institutions is not wholly determined by the will of those who belong to these institutions nor even by those who exercise authority over them. Institutions have a life of their own. They can multiply good with their beneficial effects comparatively independent of personal generosity or the lack thereof. Or they can multiply evil adversely affecting the lives of many people with a malice for surpassing the malice of the individuals involved. According to Baum, the system, the apparatus, the machine does harm and inflicts suffering even against the good will of the individuals who serve it.

Such evils as racial, class and religious discrimination, violence, abject poverty and great wealth side by side, neglect of the poor, war, etc., develop a certain solidarity in the course of time and thereby comes into existence a state of sin which all the members of the community share by way of being both agents and victims. Thus sin becomes a powerful element building itself into attitudes, structures, customs and institutions of a society. Such a society is responsible for the state of things insofar as it has helped produce it, contributes to its continuation or abstains from doing anything to alter it. Herein we can locate collective responsibility, which may be harder to assess and apportion than personal responsibility, but is nonetheless, just as real and perhaps more crucial. Everyone is individually responsible for his life and actions as well as collectively responsible for the goings on in the world.

C. Deeper insight into social sin:
Social sin as structural injustice

Social sin may justly be termed as a category that attempts to recognize and to interpret structural injustice in contemporary society. It manifests itself in sinful structures or policies that violate human dignity as, for example, discrimination on the basis of race or sex in hiring practices. It is materialized when individuals caught up in self-interest go on amassing power or wealth ignoring the interests of others. It occurs also when people do nothing to change unjust situations.

Undoubtedly, a structure that violates human dignity is a sinful structure. A system, for instance, which operates under the premise that the poor are a bad lot and therefore unfit for participation is a structure that violates the dignity of the poor. Structures that imply minimal payments, excessive surveillance, demeaning interviews or punitive philosophies are similarly sinful. Likewise are situations that promote individual selfishness. We have the example of tax systems that allow individual citizens to maintain their privileges at the expense of the poor and the marginalized.

Complicity or silent acquiescence in social injustice is another instance of social sin. This happens when one, although aware of sinful structures, refuses to try to change them when capable of doing so. Examples are the silent acceptance of an international monetary and trade system which severely damages the legitimate interests of the poor countries; the purchase of farm products produced by large agribusinesses that employ labourers at below-living wages, and lobby in state and central legislatures against allowing such workers to unionize. Continued patronage of such producers by buying their products amounts to endorsing their system of doing things and supporting the injustice done to the farm labourers. What is ironical is that many well-meaning persons contribute to such injustices without realizing it and are reluctant to accepting personal responsibility for them because purchasing such products is good

for their family. They are even outraged when told that they are contributing to "oppression". They feel that they do no evil to anyone and that criticism of the system that gives them security is an attack on their person[21].

The sad fact is that many sincere people who are actively helping oppressed people are simultaneously helping to perpetuate unjust structures in society. For example, one may be active in a movement against apartheid in South Africa and at the same time exercise authority arbitrarily as a priest in a highly clericalized Church. Somebody else may become involved in a Human Rights organization while holding a key post in a multinational company that fails to pay the Third World workers a living wage.

D. Answer to objections

It is objected that only individuals can sin and therefore speaking of the sin of groups is an exercise in futility. It goes without saying that a structure as such can hardly be the subject of ethical activity. Structures in themselves can never be guilty.

Be that as it may, structures can do a great deal of harm and thus be objectively evil. They can be sinful in the sense that they arise from sin and conduce to sin. The feebleness of our societies, the steady weakening of all social bonds, is in part a consequence of their own sinning. Individuals cannot be expected to be attached to their communities and to accept their social responsibilities wholeheartedly, if these societies are themselves perceived as iniquitous. Social sin seems to be to society what concupiscence is to individuals.

Only a human individual can commit murder, but a society can kill. Only a human person lie, but a society can deceive. Eventhough all greed and cruelty is to be sought within individual human hearts, a society can deprive to the point of starvation. In this sense social structures can and do turn into objective manifestations of sin and unfreedom. A society can be for its members and

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21. Peter Henriot; loc. cit., pp. 47 49

for others an occasion of sin or an instrument of sin. But the sin itself occurs only when people respond to the occasion or make use of the instrument. Although sin is not confined to individuals, it is ultimately always the individuals who commit sin. Accordingly, we are dealing with an analogous concept of sin when we talk of social sin.

It is indeed problematic to characterize specific social structures and economic systems as such as social sin for no structure is the exclusive outcome of sinful activity. Much is to be attributed to error and ineptitude; much else to factors outside the purview of moral responsibility. Moreover no human creation can be free of all imperfection.

II. Conversion from Social Sin

We now seek for an understanding of the content of social conversion. Conversion can no longer be looked upon as repentance from one's personal sins. Included in conversion are the critical recognition of, and the turning away from the injustices and contradictions that are found in our communities, be they political, economic, educational, ecclesiastical or whatever.

The past stress on private conversion has seemingly blinded people to structural evils in society. They failed to realize that evil in society has a double basis: in the sinful hearts of individuals as well as in the institutionalized injustices, and that the overcoming of this evil needs a movement that includes social change. There can be no authentic personal conversion without genuine commitment to changing structures for the cause of social justice. Some of the salient elements of such a commitment are considered below.

A. Conscientization of our social responsibility

The guilt of social sin is not easily experienced and that mainly for two reasons. First, because the impact of Social sin is subjectively very much weakened by the mere fact of its being the product of a whole group. It is as though each one of the group took only a numerical share of the blame, in spite of the total absurdity of such ethical arithmetic. And secondly, because social sin

is most commonly a sin of omission, and our conscience is notoriously more impervious to reproach for things we have left undone than for things we have done. Although neither of these attitudes of imperviousness is morally defensible, they are firmly established in our ordinary psychology influencing a great deal of our moral be-haviour. When moral responsibility is perceived as common responsibility, it is evaluated as diminished responsibility. The strength of the obligation we feel to do something about a given problem is inversely proportionate to the number of those who share that same obligation.

Christians are advised: "Love your neighbour as your-selves". To love one's neighbour as oneself requires that one puts oneself in the neighbour's place. Then one is com-pelled to adopt the viewpoint of the neighbour in need. And once that viewpoint is adopted, he becomes the subject of one's special care. Does it make any difference from a sufferer's viewpoint that responsibility to help him is shared by many or falls 'on one ? Does a person in need stand less in need when all others ignore him than he would if no others existed ? Because of what Christian love entails, Christians can scarcely leave urgent social good undone just because there is uncertainty as to whose obligation it is to do it.

Given the fact that we commit social sins more by omission than by commission, we are advised to recall how it is sins of omission that the Gospel most resoundingly con-demns. Going through the account of the final judgment (Mt 25:31-46), we find the negative side of that judgment concerning itself exclusively with omission — the food not provided to the hungry, the drink not offered to the thirsty, the clothing not supplied to the naked, etc. The Scribes and Pharisees are rebuked by Christ for having left undone "the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith" (Mt 23:23).

In this context we must guard ourselves against some theological distortions that are listed by Peter Henriot[22].

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 41 42

First the "religious person" in our society is often equated with the "morally upright" person. We usually focus on individual morality rather than on social morality. Traditional spirituality and morality was act-centred rather than actor-centred. As a consequence, the general quality of the person who performs the acts — his orientation, habits and attitudes — has not been emphasized. Traditional moral theology tended to be concerned with the deed performed rather than with the sort of person who performed the deed. This act-oriented approach leaves out a broad range of responsibility. With so much emphasis on what "I should do", there is not enough emphasis on what "I must be".

A second and related distortion for the theological under-development of the category of social responsibility has been the traditional doctrine of "inculpable ignorance". Traditional moral theology has always taught that a person does not sin if he is ignorant of the seriousness of the deed that he performs. He would be culpable, or guilty, if he was in fact ignorant through his own fault, for example, if he did not make a reasonable effort to enlighten himself. But if he was ignorant through no fault of his own — truly inculpable — then there would certainly be no sin involved, even if he did something very seriously wrong in the "objective order". Today if there is so much ignorance about the complexities of modern social scene with its unjust structures, it can be put down to our inertia towards social analysis and is therefore in some sense culpable.

Another reason why social responsibility has been downplayed seems to be the distinction drawn between "legal" and "moral". Although the two are often confused, they are definitely not identical, either in concept or in practice. Indeed, it is possible to have something that is completely legal according to all proper laws, but is definitely immoral in the sense that it does not render justice. An example would be a system whereby highly exhorbitant interests are charged on loans according to the law, even though it does great injustice to those lower-income persons obliged to pay the interest. An individual who 'follows the law' might consider himself to be highly moral, yet he may

fail in justice. This legalistic mentality has frequently pre-
vailed in discussions of social justice and responsibility.

B. Awareness of the prevalent unjust structures and of our involvement in them

The acknowledgement of objective or subjective
complicity in social sin is the beginning of a conversion
that should lead to its recognition and confession before
God as a group. The occasion of such public acknowledge-
ment could be the public confession of several individuals
or the public confession of groups, institutions or even
nations. When guilt is confessed as a community, this
very confession is apt to establish a converted community.
By way of example, the Evangelical Church in Germany
in its "Stuttgart Declaration' of 1945 made a public con-
fession of 'solidarity of guilt': 'Through us infinite suffering
has been extended to many peoples and countries ... To
be sure, for many long years in the name of Jesus Christ
we combated the spirit, which found hideous expression
in the Nazi rule of violence; but we accuse ourselves of
not having professed more courageously, not having
prayed more loyally, not having believed more joyously,
and not having loved more powerfully'[23]. Such confessions
keep alive a painful memory and assume the responsibility
for the injustices of history.

We need to know that we are all in some way or other
responsible for structural injustice. There are two ways in
which organizations may be unjust. First, in what they do.
Secondly, in the very way in which they are designed. If
an organization is unjust in either of these ways, then those
who staff it are contributing to that injustice, no matter what
their private attitudes and values may be.

Here is a description, summarized *verbatim* from
Donal Dorr, of the structural injustice of world poverty,
especially of Third World poverty[24]. Why is the Third
World trapped in poverty ? Is it because of the laziness
of Third World people ? No. It is because of the unjust

23. Cf. M. Sievernich *loc. cit.*, p, 59
24. Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*, Dublin, 1984, pp. 52-63

economic and trading structure built up over the past few centuries. A few hundred years ago the different regions of the world were largely self-contained, self-sufficient, and linked to each other only through a relatively small amount of trade in luxury goods. Then came the imperialist expansion of four or five European countries. They set up colonies in most of what we now call the Third World; and the economy of the colonized areas was reorganized to serve the interests of the imperial powers. Colonialism is almost gone, but it has been replaced by a neo-colonial system. This means that control over poorer countries is not usually exercised now by overt military and political power but mainly in economic ways. This economic control can create even greater hardship than the old-style colonial rule because it affects every sphere of life.

The concentration of power about which we spoke above is not confined to some nations or regions as against others; it is also a matter of some classes or groups of people being vastly more wealthy and powerful than others. Even in the poor countries — in fact especially in the poor countries — a small minority controls almost all of the wealth. In poor countries these people usually act as the agents of foreign companies; and their interests coincide with those of the foreigners rather than with the mass of their own people. It is not only in the economic sphere that power has become concentrated in the hands of a few. This also happens in the political sphere. Something similar takes place in the less tangible sphere of communications, information, and ideas. Even in the religious sphere a similar concentration of power has occurred.

The typical pattern in modern society may be represented visually by four narrow pyramids. Sitting on top of the first pyramid are those who have 'money power' - a small number of individuals, companies and countries who are dominant in the economic sphere. At the top of the second pyramid are the few who have political power. On the third pyramid are the people and organizations with a near monopoly in what could be called 'idea power' — the power to influence how people think and feel. At

the top of the fourth pyramid are those who hold what might be crudely called 'God power' — i.e., power in the religious sphere. All four pyramids have the same base; this common base represents the mass of ordinary people who have little power in any of the four spheres.

We may wonder how just a few people manage to exercise so much power. It is by setting up a large administrative machinery in each of the different spheres — economic, political, cultural and religious. By means of these different organizations the decisions of those at the top are implemented at the various levels.

There is a lot of structural injustice in the present dominant model of development. The myth of this sort of development consists in the belief that the First World has led the way and that the Third World can follow the same path and become rich and powerful in its turn. This belief is an illusion. It is simply not true that the rest of the world can develop in the same way as the Western countries. For a crucial factor in the history of Western development has been the fact that the 'undeveloped' countries were there 'beneath' them. In fact the whole purpose of the colonial system and the neo-colonialism which has replaced it, was to make use of the countries of 'the South' to enrich 'the North'. This took place in different ways at different stages of history. At first the poor countries provided cheap labour in the form of slaves. Later, as colonies, they were the source of cheap raw materials for Europe's industrial revolution. At the same time they provided a ready market for its products. In very recent times the Third World has become the place where 'dirty' industries can be sited without too much concern for the environment.

More and more committed Christians are coming to realize that to commit oneself to social justice means in practice a radical questioning of the present dominant model of development. The first major weakness in this model of development is that it is a system which contains an unregulated 'growth imperative'. Putting it in popular

terms one might say that it has a very powerful accele-
ration system but no brakes. Once the growh rate of a
country slows down, the whole developmental process
runs into trouble, and there is danger of complete collapse.
The second weakness is that it fosters a very high degree
of competitiveness. The only virtue recognized and re-
warded by the system is strength. Any concession to
humanity becomes a weakness; so too does any concern
for the long-term welfare of the community. The result
of this in-built competitiveness is that there is no effective
mechanism to regulate the speed and manner in which
new technology is introduced. But the fact that a new
invention will put people out of work is hardly ever
allowed to delay its introduction.

The futile efforts of Western governments to regulate
their economies shows that, even in the First World, the
present model of development is a beast, is no longer
under anybody's control. As for the Third World, it devours
country after country squeezing the life out of hundreds
of traditional cultures and turning them into sick cari-
catures of the Western World.

To conclude, if we want to 'act justly' it is not enough
for us to ensure that we work within the economic, politi-
cal, cultural and religious structures. Justice requires that
we make serious efforts to replace the unjust order with
one that is more equitable, one that gives much greater
opportunity to be oppressed.

C. Establishment of alternative
life-style and economics

Development means more than economic develop-
ment. Openness to metahistorical transcendence (God) and
to historical transcendence (human beings) is a prerequisite
for the flowering of human development potentialities. It
is a himalayan blunder to regard development simply in
terms of economy or technology. We style societies as de-
veloped when their members are enabled "to be more"
rather than "to have more". The main criterion of deve-
lopment is hardly production or possessions but the totality

of those qualities that are conducive to authentic human enrichment.   To be sure, quantitative increases are necessary but not any kind of increase or at any cost. Satisfying an abundance of artificial needs at the expense of keeping millions of people in misery can never be called development.

Basing on the deepest longings of the human spirit, Donal Dorr identifies several authentic human values which he calls "Kingdom values"[25], and which should animate human society:

1) *Unity*. One of the most deeply felt needs or aspirations of people today is the need for unity. People have always experienced it, but in the past the horizons of people generally stopped short at the boundaries of the community, tribe, or the nation. Nowadays, however, it is clear that nothing less than global unity — the unity of the whole human race — is required.

2) *Security*. Another fundamental human need is for security. In fact the very lengths to which people go in order to protect themselves show what a fundamental human need security is.

3) *Justice*. Another most important value is justice. Perhaps more than ever before, people today all over the world are crying out for social justice and struggling and suffering for it too.

4) *Work*. What is meant by work as a Kingdom value is the exercise of coming into touch with and tapping the life-giving powers of building a more human world. This "Kingdom work" includes many of the features that we now associate with leisure.

Time has come for more sustained and urgent action towards promoting work as a Kingdom value. Leaders could give more encouragement to those individuals or communities who are trying to develop alternative styles of living: those who are trying to use simpler technologies, and those who live on a diet that is both more healthy and less wasteful of scarce resources. The Chinese expect their managers and intellectuals to spend time working on

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25, Donal Dorr, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-130

the farms. They are trying to lessen the gap between different categories of workers and to break down 'elitism'. This should be seen by Christians as one of the signs of the times. It would be a great inspiration to people if a significant number of Church leaders were to follow the example of the very few who have adopted an alternative lifestyle. We are thinking of people like Bishop Mwoleka of Tanzania who spends some time each week doing communal farm work.

5) *Progress.* What people are looking for today is a lasting improvement, a development that will not be reversed.

Thus far we have considered Kingdom values which are very much concerned with the public sphere of secular life. Now some other Kingdom values that are generally associated with the personal and interpersonal spheres of life rather than the public sphere are considered here.

6) *Relationships.* There is a very keen awareness today that, if people are to flourish they need deep and authentic human relationships with others. Much of modern literature centres on this search for interpersonal relationships.

7) *Rootedness.* 'Rootedness' is a Kingdom value. By that is meant that human individuals and communities, if they are to flourish, must have a sense of identity, and of their own history. This is what is given to people by their culture.

8) *Harmony.* We are having in mind personal harmony, the gift of inner peace. There are two slightly different aspects to this inner peace. One is a certain integration of the personality, an ability to be "at home" with all the facets of oneself. The second is a sense of being in harmony with the world.

9) *Hope.* Hope is perhaps the most basic Kingdom value of all, for it is hope that gives meaning to the very idea of the Kingdom. The best way to understand what is meant by "the Kingdom" is to see it as the object of the deepest and most authentic human hopes. The basis for the various Kingdom values listed here has been the fundamental hope that people cling to in spite of every disappointment.

How are the values of the Kingodm to be realized effectively in our world? I have not found a better answer given to this query than that given by the oft-quoted specialist Donal Dorr and a summary of his answer is presented here[26]. First Dorr discusses the question of alternative economic structures and approaches. Then he goes on to consider alternative structures in the areas of "political power", "idea power" and "God-power". Once a certain economic system is chosen, this determines to a considerable extent the structures that will develop in the political and cultural spheres — and even in the ecclesiastical sphere. The inhumanity of the present world order in the economic sphere makes it extremely difficult to have human structures in the other spheres. If we want to change the present systems in politics or education or even in the Church, we need to envisage an alternative order in the economic sphere.

At least three of the basic principles of the presen economic system need to be questioned: 1) the determination to advance through economic "growth"; 2) the commitment to use ever higher technology; 3) the practice of making trade more and more international.

These three elements in the present system lead to the following problems: First, resources are used up more rapidly than they can be replaced. This is injustice inflicted on future generations. It also causes problems in the present. It gives rise to undue competition for the available resources. This proves an economic reason for war and the arms race. Second, more and more people are put out of work. Third, communities and nations become less and less self-sufficient. They are more and more dependent on imports — and therefore locked into the present unjust economic order. Fourth, the strong take advantage of those in a weak bargaining position; so the gap between the rich and poor is widened even further.

A truly radical alternative will have to reject the three principles listed above. So, first, the world as a whole, and

6   *I bid.*, pp. 131-163; 197-207

particularly the developed nations, will have to plan a pattern of human development that does not require ever greater production and consumption. We have to learn to do with less of this kind of expensive production. That means adopting living patterns that make us partners of nature rather than its exploiters. We need to make use of what are called "soft energy paths" (in contrast to "hard energy paths"). This means that we would use such renewable energy sources as solar power, wind and wave power and biomass; and that we put much more emphasis on the conservation of energy. Secondly, we need to challenge the present tendency to introduce ever higher technology. This does not mean that we should always opt for a low level, labour-intensive technology. What is crucial is that whatever equipmet we are using should be appropriate for the work, in the particular situation. In choosing to employ a particular kind of equipment we need to take account of all the factors that are involved. At present, the owner of a factory may choose to install mass-production equipment simply on the grounds that this makes more profit. One of the myths common in our society is the assumption that "efficiency" of this kind is good for society as a whole. It is because of this mistaken belief that governments frequently offer subsidies to industrialists to install labour-saving equipment. But what is seldom taken into account is the full cost of such action. First, people are put out of work and may have to be supported by society for the rest of their lives; a spin-off effect is that many of the young generation cannot find work, so they grow up alienated and may become vandals or drug-addicts. Secondly, the high-level technology almost always requires more energy and uses up scarce resources. Lastly, the ecological cost of the new approach is often very high. The water, air, and ground of the locality may be polluted by industrial wastes. So the "efficiency" which justifies such investment is a misnomer. It may cut the costs of the owner of the industry, but this is largely by passing on some of the real costs to the community at large or to future generations. Yet governments encourage it because each country is competing with others to widen its market by cutting costs. Thirdly, far more emphasis has to be put on local self-sufficiency

as against ever-increasing dependence on international trade. One reason for this is that in a single world market some are far more dependent than others; and those countries or groups that depend on a single crop or product are frequently exploited. For the future, the ideal must be much greater self-sufficiency among local communities in the production of basic food stuffs and everyday necessities. Where a necessary item is not available locally it should normally be got from some near community.

An alternative lifestyle with regard to consumption too is called for. There are several converging reasons why we need to change our lifestyle towards more simple living. First, it is essential that we do so, if the poor are to have a fair share of the limited resources of the earth. Secondly, from an ecological point of view it is urgent that we do so. Thirdly, it is highly to be recommended in the interests of bodily health. Fourthly, it offers us the possibility of a considerable reduction in stress, leading to greater tranquillity of spirit and peace of mind. Fifthly, it is the only course of action that offers a likelihood of full employment, and satisfying work for all.

Changes in economic structures have little hope of success unless they are accompanied by an equally radical transformation of political structures. What is needed is cooperative and participative structures at every level of society. At present people have very little opportunity to share effectively in the making of the decisions that most affect them. Hence there is need for a policy of decentralization: decisions should be made at the level of the local community as far as possible, so as to achieve maximum participation of people.

Finally there should be an alternative model of the Church. This touches on what we called 'God power'. Much of the tension that surrounds justice issues in the Church stems from the fact that committed Christians have notably different conceptions of the nature and role of the Church, generating a 'mindset' — a complex of beliefs, values, and attitudes. This mindset colours their interpretation of situations, influences their judgments and even affects

their choice of allies and friends. Each mindset underpins a different spirituality. Here are some of the conceptions of the nature of the Church, each having a different mindset and spirituality and all of them common in the Church today.

The dominant image of the first mindset is the Church as a fortress which stands out against the world in an attitude of defence and offence. It is the 'Church militant'. In view of this military image it is understandable that the associated spirituality puts a [lot of emphasis on discipline, and on the more institutional aspects of the Church. The crucial virtue in the spirituality of the lay 'foot-soldiers' is obedience. This was still the dominant concept of the Church in 1961, the year before Vatican II began. Quite a lot of Christians have never left it behind.

The new image is that of the pilgrim people of God. The pilgrim, like the soldier, may be marching through the desert; but the attitudes of the pilgrim are quite different. Christians with this outlook think of themselves as the community of believers, gathered by the Spirit, to follow Christ into the Kingdom of God. There is a fundamental equality among Christians; it is prior to any special role of ministry given to some. The greatest strength of this outlook is that it is truer to the biblical conception of the Church. It enables lay people to feel they are not second-class Christians.

The third mindset and spirituality springs from a major change of focus. The dominant image is the Christian community at the service of the wider world. The new insight is that the phrase 'people of God' must be applied not only to the Church but also to all of humanity. The great strength of the new approach is that it removes the traditional split between the sacred and the secular. Here we have a spirituality that evokes commitment to every aspect of authentic human living.

The new question that has emerged as crucial is: When you set out to serve the world, whose world are you serving ? Is it the world as structured by the rich and powerful, a world built on the dominant values of competition and success at all costs ? Or is it the world as God wants it to be, one in which structural poverty and power-

lessness are challenged, and the poor are privileged agents of God in bringing about the Kingdom?

One of the most important strengths of this spirituality is that it enables us to rediscover one of the central themes of the Bible: God's special concern for the poor and his call to them to overcome oppression. Christians find themselves called to a genuine solidarity with the poor of the world. When this call is answered, Christian faith comes alive.

A lot of the misunderstanding and controversy associated with action for justice by Christians stems from the fact that all these spiritualities exist side by side in the Church today. The different mindsets do not result in healthy pluralism but rather in suspicion and intransigence. To help oneself to understand what has gone wrong one may use the image of a train. The point of departure for the "Church train" was the "fortress spirituality". The train travelled very quickly from this first station to the fourth station — the spirituality just described. There were brief stops at the two intervening "stations". The departure from each station was so rapid that very many of the passengers were left behind. Some are still stuck at the very first station; others got off at the second or third. The really sad thing is that those who failed to travel all the way do not realize that the train has departed without them. So there are people at each of the earlier stations who assume they have reached the end of the journey. That is a peculiarly intractable source of misunderstanding and controversy. It takes a kind of conversion for anybody to recognize that he may have missed the train, or got off at the second station!

D. Political action

Since social sin is a structural phenomenon, conversion is possible only through the political process. Thus the acceptance of political action seems to be a religious imperative. We all have political responsibility. By political responsibility is meant all efforts to affect public policy, to speak to the issues of public values, to have an impact on the constitution and operation of the structures of society. From the synodal statement that action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel it can be argued that all Christians and especially consecrated persons must be politically involved. Particularly important is the notion of advocacy for the poor and powerless. A beautiful example of this is the action of Mgr. Huyghe, Bishop of Arras, and his priests[27]. They publicly denounced the injustice done to 2200 factory workers in an area of northern France When accused of meddling in politics, the bishop responded

27. "L'Eglise fait de la politique", *Documentation Catholique*, 69 (1972) p.331

with a magnificent statement that stands as a model of what advocacy ought to mean. Bishop Huyghe granted that his social gesture on behalf of the workers had some political import, but added: "I could have ceased to stand with those who are victims of the recession. This abstention would also have been a political act,less conspicuous perhaps but heavy on the conscience. All actions of 'engagement' are ambiguous. Speaking out is a political act, certainly But silence ? Whether it be that of prudence or fear, it is also a political act."

However, the effort to view human problems and to respond to them from the perpectives of the weakest and most oppressed members of society should avoid identifying any concrete option or strategy of advocacy with God's Kingdom, any particular economic, political, or social programme with the gospel. It is all too easy to approach a concrete form of advocacy as if we were the agents of the eschaton. Self-interest and sin affect not only structures but the estimates, judgments, and political strategies of those who would modify them. The involvement of the Church in politics has always been a very delicate affair. The Church should not become 'a politicized Church'. The Church has no direct political responsibility, but she cannot remain a stranger to politics. Her responsibility in politics is similar to that in economic, cultural and social spheres: prophetic and diaconial[28].

Conclusion

Love of neighbour should not stop at intersubjective and charitable actions but must include institutionally mediated relationships. Therefore, far from being alternatives, conversion of heart and improvement of structures must go hand in hand. Christians can no longer remain content with personal sanctity and the conversion of their hearts alone. They must also struggle so as to change social structures from the roots up.

Priority is to be given to changing oppressive structures without neglecting to emphasize the need for personal conversion. While dedicating ourselves to the struggle against social sin, we should not overlook our own sinfulness. Even as we expend our efforts in correcting social inequalities and restoring probity in others, we should not neglect the immediate task of self reform. Only after first looking into ourselves and pointing an accusing finger at ourselves,shall we be qualified to undertake the reformof society.

<div style="text-align: right">Felix Podimattam</div>

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28. Richard McCormick, *loc. cit.*, pp. 461-468

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